

America's Deceptive Model for Aggression

Since NATO's 1999 war on Serbia, U.S. officials have followed a script demonizing targeted foreign leaders, calling ultimatums "diplomacy," lying about "war as a last resort" and selling aggression as humanitarianism, says Nicolas J S Davies.

By Nicolas J S Davies

Across the political spectrum, U.S. leaders insist that they will only go to war "as a last resort." They want us to believe that they will try every peaceful means to resolve differences with other countries before resorting to war. But if those "peaceful means" mean only ultimatums that are unacceptable to the target country, then U.S. leaders are simply going through a diplomatic charade before going to war.

In such a case, "war as a last resort" refers only to the means of achieving a goal, not to the rights or wrongs of the goal itself. If the underlying purpose is to impose the will of the U.S. government on another country or society, then "war as a last resort" amounts to an illegal threat of war to compel a country to submit to U.S. demands, not a commitment to peace or to the rule of law.

As I wrote last February, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton uses the term "diplomacy" to mean precisely this kind of brinkmanship, which creates a pretext for war if the other side won't back down and is quite different from diplomacy to resolve international disputes peacefully, as required by the United Nations Charter and customary international law.

When Clinton told a televised "national security" forum that she "view(s) force as a last resort, not a first choice," she was echoing what she and Sen. Bernie Sanders both said in Democratic Party debates. But in Clinton's case, using the phrase "last resort" in this way is a clever way to reassure her listeners without actually modifying her hawkish and coercive approach to international relations. By contrast, Sanders was on firmer ground since he voted against two wars on Iraq (in 1990 and 2002), but did vote for war on Yugoslavia in 1999, a vote he still defends.

In negotiations at Rambouillet, France, in 1999, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright gave Yugoslavia only a devil's choice between agreeing to a NATO military occupation (of all its remaining territory, not just Kosovo) and a NATO assault. When President Slobodan Milosevic refused these impossible terms, the West blamed him for triggering a U.S.-led war that was neither a war of self-defense nor a U.N.-backed collective security operation. In other words, it was a war of aggression by the U.S. and NATO against a largely defenseless nation.

But Milosevic had been so thoroughly demonized that few Americans seriously considered Yugoslavia's position. Today, even fewer Americans know that the man our leaders tagged as a "new Hitler" and the "Butcher of the Balkans" was eventually exonerated by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), ten years after he died of a heart attack in a prison cell at The Hague.

Few also remember that the 1,380-member-strong Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM) of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) was withdrawn six days before NATO began its aerial bombardment.

Pascal Neuffer, a Swiss member of the KVM, said, "The situation on the ground on the eve of the bombing did not justify a military intervention. We could certainly have continued our work. And the explanations given in the press, saying the mission was compromised by Serb threats, did not correspond to what I saw. Let's say rather that we were evacuated because NATO had decided to bomb."

The political stage was set for NATO's assault on Yugoslavia by a battle in a village called Racak two months earlier. Yugoslav forces attacked CIA-backed Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) fighters who had terrorized the area and ambushed police patrols. The head of the KVM, former U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador William Walker, arrived in Racak the next day and misreported the battle to uncritical Western media as a massacre of civilians by Serb forces.

But autopsies conducted by Yugoslav, Belarusian and Finnish medical examiners contradicted Walker's account. The dead did not appear to be victims of summary execution. They died from a variety of gunshot wounds, as in any firefight; only one of 40 corpses examined was shot at close range; and there were only one woman and one teenage boy among the otherwise adult male bodies.

While the Western media largely parroted Walker's false account, and the confirmation of the autopsy results by the Finnish medical examiners was only partially made public in a journal article two years later, two French reporters in Kosovo immediately challenged Walker's narrative based on Associated Press video footage of the battle and other anomalies.

Questioning a Massacre

Christophe Chatelet's article in *Le Monde* was headlined, "Were the dead in Racak really massacred in cold blood?" Describing how the KLA who reoccupied the village the evening after the battle appeared to have staged the scene to look like the result of a massacre, *Le Figaro's* veteran Yugoslavia correspondent Renaud Girard presciently concluded his story on Racak with a rhetorical question, "did the KLA seek to transform a military defeat into a political

victory?"

Racak was the "atrocities" needed by President Bill Clinton and Secretary of State Albright to rally the media, the public and otherwise progressive Members of Congress like Bernie Sanders to support a war of aggression. The U.S. and its allies then dropped 23,000 bombs and missiles on civilian as well as military targets across Yugoslavia, killing thousands of civilians and striking hospitals, schools, power stations, private homes, a TV station and the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade.

Kosovo was annexed as a NATO protectorate, and Hashim Thaci, the KLA leader and organized crime figure whom Albright had chosen over Kosovo's political leaders to head its delegation at Rambouillet, is now the president of a new nation that has struggled for stability and international recognition.

But Thaci's days in the sun may be numbered – Le Figaro reported in March that an international court is preparing new charges against him. One shocking charge, already well documented by former ICTY prosecutor Carla Del Ponte and an investigation by the Council of Europe, is that Thaci was the head of a criminal gang that exploited the chaos of Kosovo under NATO bombing to murder up to 500 Serbian and Roma prisoners so that they could harvest their internal organs to sell on the international transplant market.

But the Kosovo Model has served Western warmongers well. The exaggeration or fabrication of atrocities by U.S. enemies and the blind eye turned to atrocities by U.S. allies are now standard fare whenever our leaders promote some new military intervention, and the subservient Western mainstream media remains reliable allies in these deceptions. If a foreign leader has been sufficiently demonized by Western propaganda, even baseless predictions of unlikely atrocities can serve as a *casus belli*, as was the case in Libya in 2011.

The U.K. parliament's foreign affairs committee recently concluded an inquiry into the Western destruction of Libya. One of its key findings was that the British government "failed to identify that the threat to civilians was overstated," because it "selectively took elements of Gaddafi's rhetoric at face value."

Of course, it was Western governments themselves who "overstated" the threat to civilians in Benghazi from Libyan government forces. The cherry-picking of Colonel Gaddafi's statements ignored his offer of amnesty to rebels who laid down their arms. There were also no massacres in other towns recaptured by Libyan government forces.

The committee also concluded that the emergence of "militant extremist groups"

among the NATO-backed rebels was entirely predictable; and that the U.K. “drifted into an opportunistic policy of regime change” that “was not underpinned by a strategy to support and shape post-Gaddafi Libya.”

Yet, just last April in a Democratic presidential debate, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was still repeating the same propaganda line, justifying the U.S.-supported “regime change” on the grounds that Gaddafi was a “genocidal” dictator.

If only the world had been presented with an honest account of our country’s international crimes against Yugoslavia in 1999, the worldwide civil society resistance to Western aggression against Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya would have been strengthened by broader awareness of the dangers of U.S. militarism and the deceptive role of Western propaganda in setting the stage for war.

We’ll never know for sure, but that might just have tipped the balance in favor of those who insisted that only the guilty should be punished for the crimes of 9/11, not millions of innocent people in Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries.

Massive Military Spending

Politicians and candidates keep telling us that the key to our safety and security lies in the strength of the U.S. military, which must therefore always be two or three times larger and more expensive than those of all its potential enemies combined. The U.S. today spends more on its military than the sum of our nine closest military competitors (most of whom are U.S. allies in any case) and more than the total military spending of 182 less militarized countries combined.

Despite the chaos unleashed by decades of military adventurism, U.S. leaders seem blissfully unaware that this lop-sided military imbalance is undermining global security and stability instead of improving it. After President George W. Bush oversaw the most expensive unilateral arms build-up in history, President Obama has achieved what would have seemed impossible to most Americans in 2008 – he has actually outspent Bush.

The reason that this imbalance is so dangerous lies in the very nature of military force. Weapons of war are designed to wound, maim or kill people, not to help them in any way. Bombs and missiles do not rebuild buildings, cities or societies – they only damage or destroy them.

The term “regime change” is a misnomer. Overwhelming military force does not “change” regimes – it just destroys them. We should understand by now that when our leaders threaten to “change” a regime by military force, that will replace

it only with rubble, graveyards, chaos, corruption and poverty.

But this huge imbalance in military forces and expenditures creates the dangerous illusion that our leaders can threaten or use military force to reshape the world as they see fit, to solve any problem or achieve any geostrategic goal. Corporate media, from Hollywood to the *New York Times*, spin this military madness into a full-fledged fantasy in which a country that doesn't even provide its own people with basic human rights like healthcare, housing or a subsistence living, and instead manages poverty with aggressive, militarized policing and mass incarceration, is cast as a global warrior for democracy and human rights.

U.S. leaders saw the collapse of the Soviet Union as an ideological victory that opened doors to expand the U.S.-based capitalist economic system to the four corners of the world. They have bullied and bribed compliant governments to join U.S.-led trade and investment schemes that prioritize concentration of wealth and power over people and the environment.

Countries that resist integration into this neoliberal system or try to develop alternative models are subject to withering propaganda, crippling sanctions, U.S.-backed coups and, in the "last resort," to the threat and catastrophic use of military force.

This strategy and the role of the U.S. military in enforcing it have now been explicitly detailed in U.S. policy documents for 25 years, beginning with the original version of the Pentagon's "Defense Planning Guidance" that was leaked to the *New York Times* in 1992. This U.S. policy of illegal, unilateral use of force to "protect vital U.S. interests," explicitly defined to include "uninhibited access to key markets, energy supplies and strategic resources," was formally unveiled to the world in the 1997 Quadrennial Defense Review and the 2002 National Security Strategy.

The late Sen. Edward Kennedy condemned the latter as "a call for 21st century American imperialism that no other country can or should accept." But there is no hint that the spiral of violence and chaos our leaders have unleashed across the world has led them to rethink their commitment to the illegal threat and use of military force as an instrument of U.S. policy.

What we need from our political leaders and candidates is not the threat of more "last resort" wars on the Kosovo model, but a new commitment to peace and international law, most importantly to the U.N. Charter's prohibition on the threat or use of military force.

Until then, we should interpret deceptive formulations like "force as a last

resort” as meaning that our leaders remain committed to an endless state of war that they have no idea how to contain or control. If humanity and civilization are to survive, we must force them to consider a very different “last resort”: peace, disarmament and a rule of law that governs the rich and powerful as well as the poor and downtrodden.

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Target: Yugoslavia (A Look into the Future)

From the Archive: NATO’s 1999 war on Serbia showcased some of America’s then-cutting-edge strategies for waging electronic sabotage against an “enemy,” including hacking computers and controlling information, wrote Robert Parry in real time.

By Robert Parry (Originally published on May 4, 1999)

At center stage and behind the scenes, NATO’s war for Kosovo is pressing the edges of modern “information warfare.” Through the early phases of the conflict, NATO concentrated its attacks on command-and-control centers, power stations and even propaganda outlets. Those attacks included sophisticated electronic assaults on computers directing Serb air defenses and so-called “soft bombs” to short out electrical lines.

But there are new indications that President Bill Clinton might be opting for a far more expansive high-tech “info-war” assault to punish the Yugoslavian government, its leaders and the nation’s economy for atrocities in Kosovo.

In such an electronic offensive against Serbia, U.S. intelligence has the secret capability to go much further than sporadic battlefield computer hacking and causing black-outs. U.S. info-warriors have the capacity to plant viruses in civilian computer systems, alter bank records, and generally wreak havoc on Yugoslavia’s infrastructure, from disrupting electrical utilities to shutting down the phone system.

U.S. government hackers could target government bank accounts used for purchasing military supplies or the personal accounts of Yugoslav leaders. Funds

could be deleted electronically to frustrate the prosecution of the war or to punish selected Yugoslav leaders for "ethnic cleansing" in Kosovo.

Intelligence sources say the U.S. forces in the Balkans were ill-prepared for this broader info-war when the NATO bombing started on March 24, 1999. One reason was the difficulty of gaining a NATO consensus for exotic tactics.

So initially, the info-war focused only on the battlefield. *Time* magazine caught a glimpse of the U.S. capability in its reporting on the Pentagon's successes in "taking down the Serbian air defenses." The Pentagon cited "attacks, jamming and corrupting data, which the allies have fed into Yugoslav computers through microwave transmissions." [*Time*, April 26, 1999]

A Bag of Tricks

Later, expert teams were mobilized and tasked to the Yugoslav theater. Then, after NATO approved expanded operations, the U.S. military began pulling surprises out of its technological bag of tricks.

The first widely noted application of classified techno-warfare occurred on May 2, 1999. A "soft" bomb detonated over a Yugoslav electrical plant, spraying carbon filaments over the power lines and causing short-circuits that blacked out most of the country for seven hours.

"We have certain weapons we don't talk about," said Maj. Gen. Charles Wald. In line with info-war strategies, he noted that an electrical outage "confuses command and control, it disconnects and confuses computers."

Government sources say that President Clinton now is poised to go further in using some of the Big Brother capabilities that are featured in Hollywood thrillers, such as "Enemy of the State," though the techniques are rarely acknowledged officially.

The sources said Clinton has authorized secret intelligence operations against Yugoslavia, but those sources were unwilling to discuss any details about the high-tech strategies. Countries, such as Yugoslavia, with relatively primitive computers running their economy are considered especially vulnerable to info-war attacks, according to experts in these strategies.

Moral Issues

Some info-war advocates also argue that computer sabotage is a far more humane way to wage war than the current practice of dropping bombs and firing off missiles. These advocates note the obvious: that electronic attacks do not carry the immediate physical risk to civilians that explosives do.

But there are ethical concerns, too, about attacking a nation's computer infrastructure and severely destabilizing its economy. Plus, there are fears that a computer virus or a similar tactic could backfire and infect computers far beyond Yugoslavia.

In a rare media report on the sensitive topic, *The National Journal* recently observed that "relatively modest questions [have been] raised here at home by the United States' undoubted ability to wage offensive information warfare by hacking into foreign computers to pilfer secrets, move funds, corrupt data, and destroy software.

"When such activities are planned for a narrow, routine, peacetime spy operation, they are dubbed 'special intelligence operations' and must be approved by top officials, sometimes even by the president. But what if a more massive U.S. hacker attack was designed to wreck the computers that control an enemy's banking system, electrical-power grid, or telephone network?" [National Journal, March 27, 1999]

While skirting clear confirmation of a U.S. offensive info-war capability, American officials occasionally do discuss info-war developments in the third person, as if the United States were not a participant in this new arms race.

On Feb. 2, 1999, for instance, CIA Director George Tenet stated that "several countries have or are developing the capability to attack an adversary's computer systems." He added that "developing a computer attack capability can be quite inexpensive and easily conceal-able: it requires little infrastructure, and the technology required is dual-use."

Left unsaid in Tenet's statement was that the U.S. government, with the world's most powerful computers and the most sophisticated software designs, has led the way both in offensive info-war strategies and defensive countermeasures.

Other times, when info-war gets mentioned in the American news media, it is in the context of a real or potential threat from an "enemy" seeking to damage the United States and its allies.

On March 31, 1999, one week into NATO's air war, NATO's spokesman Jamie Shea prompted "info-war" alert headlines in U.S. newspapers when he complained that "some hackers in Belgrade" had caused "line saturation" at the official NATO Web site.

But NATO computer experts acknowledged that this low-grade harassment was more "spamming" than hacking and that no sensitive computer systems had been entered. [Washington Post, April 1, 1999]

Revolutionary Potential

The U.S. military demonstrated the revolutionary potential of information warfare during the Persian Gulf War in 1990-91. With air attacks and technical means, U.S. forces destroyed Saddam Hussein's command-and-control structure even before concentrating on his tanks and troops.

Scattered journalistic reports at the time noted U.S. success in planting viruses in Iraqi military computer systems. Since the Gulf War, however, Washington apparently has applied info-war techniques sparingly.

Sources say covert info-war attacks have been limited to such national security concerns as disrupting the financial operations of some South American drug cartels.

In one case study of a CIA high-tech "dirty trick" from the mid-1990s, U.S. intelligence reportedly learned of a drug lord's plans to bribe a South American government official. After the money was transferred, the spy agency accessed the bank records and remotely deleted the bribe.

Besides stopping the bribe, the money's disappearance spread confusion within the cartel. The recriminations that followed – with the corrupt official and the drug lord complaining about the lost money – led eventually to the execution of a hapless bookkeeper, according to the story.

By the mid-1990s, the potential for info-war had become such a hot topic within the U.S. military that the Pentagon hired an outside consultant to summarize some of the important lessons in a chatty 13-page booklet called "Information Warfare for Dummies."

The booklet was designed to clue in some of the Pentagon's more unplugged officers "given our department's unrelenting focus on the topic." The booklet starts out by explaining the first objective for any lap-topped GI fighting a future Information War [IW]: "Destroy (or weaken) the bad guy's system and protect your own."

The manual separates the more traditional military methods from the new high-tech techniques. "Assault technologies for the Information Warrior can be divided into 'hard kill,' involving physical destruction, and 'soft kill,' where the goal is electronic or psychological disruption," the primer states. "Their commonality lies in their emphatic focus on information – destroying it, corrupting it, and denying it."

The primer notes that more traditional information warfare will target an enemy's battlefield command-and-control structure to "decapitate" the fighters

from their senior officers, thereby “causing panic and paralysis.” But the primer adds that “network penetrations” – or hacking – “represents a new and very high-tech form of warfighting.”

Indirectly, the booklet acknowledges secret U.S. capabilities in these areas. In an easy-to-read style, the manual describes these info-war tactics as “fairly ground-breaking stuff for our nation’s mud-sloggers. ... Theft and the intentional manipulation of data are the product of devilish minds. ... Pretty shady, those Army folks.”

Disruptive Strategies

The primer also gives some hints about the disruptive strategies in the U.S. arsenal. “Network penetrations” include “insertion of malicious code (viruses, worms, etc.), theft of information, manipulation of information, denial of service,” the primer says.

But the booklet also recognizes the taboo nature of the topic. “Due to the moral, ethical and legal questions raised by hacking, the military likes to keep a low profile on this issue,” the primer explains. “Specific DOD references to viral insertions are scarce” in public literature, the booklet observes.

The ethical questions include: “Is penetrating another nation’s computer system somehow ‘dirty’ and ‘wrong’ – something the U.S. military has no business doing? Are electronic attacks against a nation’s financial transaction computers too destabilizing and perhaps immoral?”

Despite the Pentagon’s nervousness about these tactics, the booklet notes that they do have advantages over other military operations. “The intrusions can be carried out remotely, transcending the boundaries of time and space,” the manual states. “They also offer the prospect of ‘plausible deniability’ or repudiation.”

The booklet indicates that U.S. intelligence has found it relatively easy to cover its tracks. “Due to the difficulty of tracing a network penetration to its source, it’s difficult for the adversary to prove that you are the one responsible for corrupting their system,” the primer says. “In fact, viral infections can be so subtle and insidious that the adversary may not even know that their systems have been attacked.”

The primer outlines other Buck-Rogers-type info-war weapons, such as electromagnetic pulse [EMP] bombs. “The high-energy pulse emitted by an EMP bomb can temporarily or permanently disable all electronics systems, including computers, for a radius of several kilometers,” the manual says.

“Put simply, EMP weaponry fries electronic circuitry. EMP weapons can be launched by airborne platforms or detonated inside information centers (banks, corporate headquarters, telephone exchanges, military command posts). The explosion needed to trigger the electromagnetic pulse apparently is minor compared to a conventional blast, theoretically resulting in fewer human casualties.”

The manual stresses, too, info-war’s potential for high-quality “psyops and deception” to confuse and demoralize a targeted population. “Future applications of psyops may include realistic computer simulations and ‘morphed’ imagery broadcasts of bogus news events,” the booklet explains.

Though deception has always been part of warfare, the booklet argues that “it is the sheer qualitative differences offered by today’s information technologies that makes IW potentially revolutionary.”

Some military theoreticians call the info-war capabilities “a Military-Techonogical Revolution,” a phrase reserved for major breakthroughs such as the discovery of gun powder or the development of strategic bombing.

But the manual observes some dangers. The info-war attacks, especially viral infections, could backfire and harm U.S. interests.

Recruiting Hackers

The manual wonders, too, whether the Army will have success in recruiting “hacker-types and ‘nerds’.” Then, there is “the \$64 question: will the hackers ‘go bad’ and given the fighter-jock mentality of the U.S. military, will the ‘nerd track’ be a career killer?”

More recent internal papers indicate that in the past year, the Pentagon has begun concentrating on how to maintain its dominance in the info-war field.

Rand’s National Defense Research Institute drafted a report entitled “Strategic Information Warfare Rising” and suggested to the Pentagon several scenarios for managing and sharing “strategic information warfare” [SIW] capabilities with allies.

One scenario holds that the United States “overwhelmingly dominates the SIW warfare” with “the world’s best offensive SIW tools and techniques, capable of penetrating any other country’s SIW defenses.” The United States could then pick which allies would come under its defensive umbrella.

Another scenario foresees the United States leading five to 10 countries with advanced SIW capabilities, but with other nations lacking the technical skills

to break into “the exclusivity of the club.”

Other scenarios stress defensive rather than offensive capacities. But an underlying theme of the report is the unquestioned dominance of the United States in these fields. [Intelligence Newsletter, Jan. 28, 1999]

Other insights into U.S. info-war capabilities can be found in papers of military intelligence specialists from other nations. In articles in China’s Liberation Army Daily, Cols. Wang Baocun and Li Fei expressed alarm about the West’s impressive lead in sophisticated information warfare.

In an apparent reference to the U.S. military and its allies, the authors wrote, “some countries are now considering the organization and establishment of computer virus warfare platoons.” [Liberation Army Daily, June 13 & 20, 1995]

It is not clear whether such “platoons” formally exist in the U.S. Army – though obviously the specialty does. It also is too early to tell whether such information warriors will play a significant role in the war for Kosovo.

But, depending how aggressive President Clinton chooses to be, the Balkan war could turn into an important testing ground for these new offensive tactics – the conflict could become what the president might call a warfare bridge to the 21st Century.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America’s Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).

Television Wars (Crossing a Line in Serbia)

From the Archive: President Bill Clinton’s bombardment of Serbia in 1999 marked a grim turn in the practice of “information warfare,” with a lethal NATO attack targeting a Serb TV station which criticized the war, observed war correspondent Don North.

By Don North (Originally published on May 4, 1999)

On April 23, 1999, at 2:06 a.m. Belgrade time, as NATO was preparing for its

50th anniversary celebration in Washington D.C., two cruise missiles struck the Radio Televizija Srbija (SRT) headquarters in Belgrade.

About 150 civilian journalists, producers, technicians and janitors were working the nightshift when the missiles hit with what NATO called "surgical precision."

The building's four stories collapsed to the ground, sandwiching offices, television equipment, transmitters and people into a pile of smoldering rubble only 15 feet high.

TV screens throughout Serbia went blank in the middle of a Houston, Texas, TV station's interview with Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic. Firemen rushed to the scene to remove the injured. One technician trapped by tons of concrete could be extracted only by the amputation of both legs.

As the smoke and dust settled, at least 16 people were confirmed dead, another 19 injured and others were missing and feared buried in the rubble. But NATO's premeditated attack on a civilian media target did little to drive SRT off the air.

By daylight, alternate transmitters had been activated and Serb TV was back on the air again. That morning, a blond woman was reading the morning news and calmly placed the devastation of SRT several minutes down the lineup of top news stories.

Few foreign journalists had believed that NATO actually would bomb SRT. But the Serbs did – and were prepared.

The Clinton administration and NATO made no apologies for the civilian dead. "Serb TV is as much a part of Milosevic's murder machine as his military," said Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon. "The media is one of the pillars of Milosevic's power machine. It is right up there with security forces and the military."

A Quiet Acceptance

The reaction to the SRT bombing was muted within many U.S. news organizations. Elsewhere, however, journalists and humanitarian organizations, including Amnesty International and Reporters Without Borders, condemned the strike against SRT.

Notable was a terse letter to NATO's Secretary General Javier Solana from the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists: "NATO's decision to target civilian broadcast facilities not only increases the danger for reporters now working in Yugoslavia but permanently jeopardizes all journalists as

noncombatants in international conflicts as provided for in the Geneva Conventions. It represents an apparent change in NATO policy only days after your spokesman Jamie Shea offered assurances that civilian targets would be avoided.”

From Belgrade, the Association of Independent Electronic Media in Yugoslavia, a leading voice of Serbian anti-Milosevic sentiment, also condemned the attack. “History has shown that no form of repression, particularly the organized and premeditated murder of journalists, can prevent the flow of information, nor can it prevent the public from choosing its own sources of information,” the groups said.

The *New York Times* quoted a senior Serb journalist saying he thought NATO had crossed an ambiguous moral line: “The people who were there were just doing their jobs. They have no influence on the content or on Milosevic. I hate Serb television. [But] we can differentiate between big lies and little ones.” [NYT, April 24, 1999]

Yugoslav officials said NATO was trying to destroy the free marketplace of ideas and insure that just one side’s “propaganda” could be disseminated.

Offending NATO

There is no doubt that SRT was a propaganda organ for Milosevic and his regime. Since the NATO bombing campaign began on March 24, 1999, SRT also had deeply offended NATO’s sensibilities with its graphics.

The NATO symbol was regularly shown turning into a Nazi swastika and Madeleine Albright grew Dracula teeth in front of burning buildings.

While highlighting the suffering from NATO air attacks, SRT ignored the tens of thousands of Albanian refugees fleeing Kosovo with their tales of rape and execution. SRT repeatedly showed video clips of old scenes: Milosevic meeting Serbian church leaders, Russian envoys and the Kosovo Albanian leader Ibrahim Rugova.

But the station also broadcast to the world dramatic images of destruction caused by the NATO bombing and gave credible estimates of civilian casualties. SRT scooped the world press when it disclosed that a NATO aircraft had killed scores of Kosovar refugees in a bombing attack.

After SRT broadcast the scenes of the civilian carnage, NATO flip-flopped through the next 24-hour news cycle. NATO’s first response was: “We didn’t do it, the Serbs did it.” That changed to “we did bomb the column, but the Serbs killed the refugees.” Finally, NATO accepted fault and apologized.

Still, NATO's glib cockney spokesman, Jamie Shea, pushed the edges of Orwellian doublespeak when he declared that the pilot had "dropped his bombs in good faith."

Later, NATO played an audio-tape supposedly of the pilot in question. But it turned out that the recorded pilot was involved in a completely different operation. The real tape was withheld.

The SRT bombing, however, was no mistake. Internally, NATO had been debating for weeks whether or not to destroy Serb television.

Shea even suggested that the network might be spared if it would begin broadcasting at least six hours of Western news reports reflecting NATO's views. Ironically, SRT had been broadcasting many of NATO's pronouncements, albeit focusing on the misstatements and contradictions.

Still, though the bombing of SRT may have been aimed at the Milosevic propaganda machine, it also set back American and other foreign TV efforts to document the siege of Belgrade. Most of the video broadcast on international TV showing the results of bombing raids was obtained from SRT.

Controlling Information

Even before the SRT attack, NATO's struggle to control the information flow had riled many leading Western media outlets.

On April 9, 1999, editors and executives of seven major U.S. news organizations – including *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and CNN – protested to Defense Secretary William Cohen and urged him to loosen controls on information about the air strikes.

"Detailed information about the allied operation is vital to an informed public discussion of this matter of national interest," the letter said. "On many days, the state-controlled Yugoslav media has been more specific about NATO targets than the United States or NATO."

Historically, of course, the U.S. military has always been uncomfortable with American journalists reporting from behind enemy lines. Many senior U.S. officers are veterans of the Vietnam War and believe that American journalists should tailor their reporting to support the cause.

In that vein, Harrison Salisbury, the famous war correspondent for *The New York Times* was hailed for his reporting from the siege of Leningrad in World War II, when the Soviet Union was allied with the United States.

But when Salisbury became the first correspondent from a major U.S. newspaper to

report from Hanoi during the Vietnam War, he was denounced as disloyal. In December 1966, Salisbury wrote, "Whatever the explanation, one can see United States planes are dropping an enormous weight of explosives on purely civilian targets." His work earned him the nickname "Ho Chi Salisbury" at the Pentagon.

CNN's Peter Arnett smuggled a satellite phone into Baghdad and reported live during the Persian Gulf War. His stories included moving first-person accounts of civilian targets destroyed by U.S. air attacks. In Washington, Arnett was subjected to insults as traitorous "Baghdad Pete."

Sparing Americans

Some similar tensions – though not as severe – have surfaced in the current war for Kosovo. In the case of the SRT attack, however, U.S. officials were careful not to worsen relations with the American news media by accidentally killing U.S. correspondents.

In mid-April, about a week before the cruise missiles were launched, the White House reportedly tipped off the CNN brass about the impending attack of SRT headquarters. CNN bosses called Belgrade and ordered CNN's people out of the SRT building where they had been preparing TV reports for a month.

Other reporters, however, did not get the word, or chose not to believe it. *The London Independent's* Robert Fisk, an intrepid Western reporter, said he was invited to the doomed building for coffee and orange juice by Goran Matic, a Serb government official. Matic was convinced that the TV studios were next on NATO's target list.

"Yet, oddly, we didn't take him seriously," Fisk reported. "Even when the air raid siren sounded, I stayed for another coffee. ... Surely NATO wouldn't waste its bombs on this tiresome station with its third-rate propaganda and old movies, let alone kill its staff. Once you kill people because you don't like what they say, you change the rules of war."

The content of SRT broadcasts also was more complicated than NATO has asserted.

Besides serving as a Serb government voice, SRT was a center of cultural identity for the Serb nation. With the destruction of SRT headquarters, thousands of tapes and films have now been crushed to rubble, videos that once helped tell the Serbs and their children who they are – and provide some small comfort in their difficult lives.

Among the tapes smashed and burned was a program that I produced called "Servus, Adieu, Shalom," a documentary tracing the long history of Viennese Jews, their persecution, their suffering in the Holocaust and their community's resurgence

in recent years.

The film was my donation to the UNESCO video bank. It was translated into the Serb language and distributed by UNESCO to SRT and other Balkan TV stations strapped for funds to buy quality programs.

My tape was being used in Belgrade as part of international efforts to encourage the region's ethnic groups to overcome their historic hatreds.

There is also the question whether NATO's briefings, aired live by CNN and other Western all-news networks, constitute propaganda as dubious as what appeared on SRT. On April 20, 1999, for instance, Shea reported that ethnic Albanian boys were forced to give blood for Serb casualties.

Though highly inflammatory, the allegation was made without attribution and without verifiable details. On April 22, Serbian Health Minister Leposava Milicevic denied Shea's report, and Shea did not respond.

The mix of NATO propaganda and the selection of Serb targets also may represent a broader psychological warfare campaign against the Serb people. Gen. Wesley Clark, the American NATO commander, announced that NATO was seeking targets to "see to it that the morale of the people in Serbia continues to erode."

Since the April 23 bombing, SRT transmissions have jumped from one site to another in hopes of avoiding the next bombs. Now, high on NATO's target list is Politico Television, another outlet of Milosevic's power structure in downtown Belgrade.

The London Guardian interviewed a 29-year-old tape editor, Vena Ducic, who was working the nightshift there along with about 100 other employees. "I am terrified," Ducic said. "But I have two boys, so if I give up my job what do we do tomorrow?"

Beyond breaking the Serbs' will, however, the attack on SRT was a blow to the world's ability to view unfettered information, even when it is interspersed with propaganda.

Paul Scott Mowrer, a correspondent for the *Chicago Daily News* during World War I, understood the need for a maximum flow of news at a time when human lives are in the balance. He wrote: "In this nation of ours, the final political decisions rest with the people. And the people, so that they may make up their minds, must be given the facts, even in time of war, or perhaps, especially in time of war."

Don North is a veteran war correspondent who covered the Vietnam War and many other conflicts around the world. He is the author of a new book, *Inappropriate*

Conduct, the story of a World War II correspondent whose career was crushed by the intrigue he uncovered.

The Bogus 'Humanitarian' War on Serbia

NATO's war on Serbia in 1999 was the template for other "humanitarian" wars – in Iraq, Libya and now Syria – but it wasn't "news" when the Serbian leader was cleared, notes John Pilger.

By John Pilger

The exoneration of a man accused of the worst of crimes, genocide, made no headlines. Neither the BBC nor CNN covered it. The Guardian allowed a brief commentary. Such a rare official admission was buried or suppressed, understandably. It would explain too much about how the rulers of the world rule.

The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague has quietly cleared the late Serbian president, Slobodan Milosevic, of war crimes committed during the 1992-95 Bosnian war, including the massacre at Srebrenica.

Far from conspiring with the convicted Bosnian-Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, Milosevic actually "condemned ethnic cleansing," opposed Karadzic and tried to stop the war that dismembered Yugoslavia. Buried near the end of a 2,590-page judgment on Karadzic last February, this truth further demolishes the propaganda that justified NATO's illegal onslaught on Serbia in 1999.

Milosevic died of a heart attack in 2006, alone in his cell in The Hague, during what amounted to a bogus trial by an American-invented "international tribunal." Denied heart surgery that might have saved his life, his condition worsened and was monitored and kept secret by U.S. officials, as WikiLeaks has since revealed.

Milosevic was the victim of war propaganda that today runs like a torrent across our screens and newspapers and beckons great danger for us all. He was the prototype demon, vilified by the Western media as the "butcher of the Balkans" who was responsible for "genocide," especially in the secessionist Yugoslav province of Kosovo. Prime Minister Tony Blair said so, invoked the Holocaust and demanded action against "this new Hitler."

Exaggerating the Death Toll

David Scheffer, the U.S. ambassador-at-large for war crimes, declared that as many as “225,000 ethnic Albanian men aged between 14 and 59” may have been murdered by Milošević’s forces.

This was the justification for NATO’s bombing, led by Bill Clinton and Blair, that killed hundreds of civilians in hospitals, schools, churches, parks and television studios and destroyed Serbia’s economic infrastructure.

It was blatantly ideological; at a notorious “peace conference” in Rambouillet in France, Milošević was confronted by Madeleine Albright, the U.S. Secretary of State, who was to achieve infamy with her remark that the deaths of half a million Iraqi children were “worth it.”

Albright delivered an “offer” to Milošević that no national leader could accept. Unless he agreed to the foreign military occupation of his country, with the occupying forces “outside the legal process,” and to the imposition of a neo-liberal “free market,” Serbia would be bombed.

This was contained in an “Appendix B,” which the media failed to read or suppressed. The aim was to crush Europe’s last independent “socialist” state.

Once NATO began bombing, there was a stampede of Kosovar refugees “fleeing a holocaust.” When it was over, international police teams descended on Kosovo to exhume the victims.

The FBI failed to find a single mass grave and went home. The Spanish forensic team did the same, its leader angrily denouncing “a semantic pirouette by the war propaganda machines.”

The final count of the dead in Kosovo was 2,788. This included combatants on both sides and Serbs and Roma murdered by the pro-NATO Kosovo Liberation Front. There was no genocide. The NATO attack was both a fraud and a war crime.

All but a fraction of America’s vaunted “precision guided” missiles hit not military but civilian targets, including the news studios of Radio Television Serbia in Belgrade. Sixteen people were killed, including cameramen, producers and a make-up artist. Blair described the dead, profanely, as part of Serbia’s “command and control.”

In 2008, the prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Carla Del Ponte, revealed that she had been pressured not to investigate NATO’s crimes.

A Model for More Wars

This was the model for Washington’s subsequent invasions of Afghanistan, Iraq,

Libya and, by stealth, Syria. All qualify as “paramount crimes” under the Nuremberg standard; all depended on media propaganda.

While tabloid journalism played its traditional part, it was serious, credible, often liberal journalism that was the most effective – the evangelical promotion of Blair and his wars by the Guardian, the incessant lies about Saddam Hussein’s non-existent weapons of mass destruction in the Observer and the New York Times, and the unerring drumbeat of government propaganda by the BBC in the silence of its omissions.

At the height of the bombing, the BBC’s Kirsty Wark interviewed General Wesley Clark, the NATO commander. The Serbian city of Nis had just been sprayed with American cluster bombs, killing women, old people and children in an open market and a hospital. Wark asked not a single question about this, or about any other civilian deaths.

Others were more brazen. In February 2003, the day after Blair and Bush had set fire to Iraq, the BBC’s political editor, Andrew Marr, stood in Downing Street and made what amounted to a victory speech. He excitedly told his viewers that Blair had “said they would be able to take Baghdad without a bloodbath, and that in the end the Iraqis would be celebrating. And on both of those points he has been proved conclusively right.”

Today, with a million dead and a society in ruins, Marr’s BBC interviews are recommended by the U.S. Embassy in London.

Marr’s colleagues lined up to pronounce Blair “vindicated.” The BBC’s Washington correspondent, Matt Frei, said, “There’s no doubt that the desire to bring good, to bring American values to the rest of the world, and especially to the Middle East ... is now increasingly tied up with military power.”

Obeisance to Power

This obeisance to the United States and its collaborators as a benign force “bringing good” runs deep in Western establishment journalism. It ensures that the present-day catastrophe in Syria is blamed exclusively on Bashar al-Assad, whom the West and Israel have long conspired to overthrow, not for any humanitarian concerns, but to consolidate Israel’s aggressive power in the region.

The jihadist forces unleashed and armed by the U.S., Britain, France, Turkey and their “coalition” proxies serve this end. It is they who dispense the propaganda and videos that becomes news in the U.S. and Europe, and provide access to journalists and guarantee a one-sided “coverage” of Syria.

The city of Aleppo is in the news. Most readers and viewers will be unaware that the majority of the population of Aleppo lives in the government-controlled western part of the city. That they suffer daily artillery bombardment from Western-sponsored Al Qaeda is not news. On 21 July, French and American bombers attacked a government village in Aleppo province, killing up to 125 civilians. This was reported on page 22 of the Guardian; there were no photographs.

Having created and underwritten jihadism in Afghanistan in the 1980s as Operation Cyclone – a weapon to destroy the Soviet Union – the U.S. is doing something similar in Syria. Like the Afghan Mujahedeen, the Syrian “rebels” are America’s and Britain’s foot soldiers. Many fight for Al Qaeda and its variants; some, like the Nusra Front, have rebranded themselves to comply with American sensitivities over 9/11. The CIA runs them, with difficulty, as it runs jihadists all over the world.

The immediate aim is to destroy the government in Damascus, which, according to the most credible poll (YouGov Siraj), the majority of Syrians support, or at least look to for protection, regardless of the barbarism in its shadows. The long-term aim is to deny Russia a key Middle Eastern ally as part of a NATO war of attrition against the Russian Federation that eventually destroys it.

Nuclear Risk

The nuclear risk is obvious, though suppressed by the media across “the free world”. The editorial writers of the Washington Post, having promoted the fiction of WMD in Iraq, demand that Obama attack Syria. Hillary Clinton, who publicly rejoiced at her executioner’s role during the destruction of Libya, has repeatedly indicated that, as president, she will “go further” than Obama.

Gareth Porter, a journalist reporting from Washington, recently revealed the names of those likely to make up a Clinton cabinet who plan an attack on Syria. All have belligerent Cold War histories; the former CIA director, Leon Panetta, says that “the next president is gonna have to consider adding additional special forces on the ground.”

What is most remarkable about the war propaganda now in flood tide is its patent absurdity and familiarity. I have been looking through archive film from Washington in the 1950s when diplomats, civil servants and journalists were witch-hunted and ruined by Sen. Joe McCarthy for challenging the lies and paranoia about the Soviet Union and China. Like a resurgent tumor, the anti-Russia cult has returned.

In Britain, the Guardian’s Luke Harding leads his newspaper’s Russia-haters in a stream of journalistic parodies that assign to Vladimir Putin every earthly

iniquity. When the Panama Papers leak was published, the front page said Putin, and there was a picture of Putin; never mind that Putin was not mentioned anywhere in the leaks.

Like Milosevic, Putin is Demon Number One. It was Putin who shot down a Malaysian airliner over Ukraine. Headline: "As far as I'm concerned, Putin killed my son." No evidence required.

It was Putin who was responsible for Washington's documented (and paid for) overthrow of the elected government in Kiev in 2014. The subsequent terror campaign by fascist militias against the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine was the result of Putin's "aggression." Preventing Crimea from becoming a NATO missile base and protecting the mostly Russian population who had voted in a referendum to rejoin Russia – from which Crimea had been annexed – were more examples of Putin's "aggression".

A Warmongering Media

Smear by media inevitably becomes war by media. If war with Russia breaks out, by design or by accident, journalists will bear much of the responsibility.

In the U.S., the anti-Russia campaign has been elevated to virtual reality. The New York Times columnist Paul Krugman, an economist with a Nobel Prize, has called Donald Trump the "Siberian Candidate" because Trump is Putin's man, he says.

Trump had dared to suggest, in a rare lucid moment, that war with Russia might be a bad idea. In fact, he has gone further and removed American arms shipments to Ukraine from the Republican platform. "Wouldn't it be great if we got along with Russia," he said.

This is why America's warmongering liberal establishment hates him. Trump's racism and ranting demagoguery have nothing to do with it. Bill and Hillary Clinton's record of racism and extremism can out-trump Trump's any day. (This week is the 20th anniversary of the Clinton welfare "reform" that launched a war on African-Americans). As for Obama: while American police gun down his fellow African-Americans the great hope in the White House has done nothing to protect them, nothing to relieve their impoverishment, while running four rapacious wars and an assassination campaign without precedent.

The CIA has demanded Trump is not elected. Pentagon generals have demanded he is not elected. The pro-war New York Times – taking a breather from its relentless low-rent Putin smears – demands that he is not elected. Something is up.

These tribunes of "perpetual war" are terrified that the multi-billion-dollar

business of war by which the United States maintains its dominance will be undermined if Trump does a deal with Putin, then with China's Xi Jinping. Their panic at the possibility of the world's great power talking peace – however unlikely – would be the blackest farce were the issues not so dire.

"Trump would have loved Stalin!" bellowed Vice-President Joe Biden at a rally for Hillary Clinton. With Clinton nodding, he shouted, "We never bow. We never bend. We never kneel. We never yield. We own the finish line. That's who we are. We are America!"

Britain's War Party

In Britain, Jeremy Corbyn has also excited hysteria from the war-makers in the Labour Party and from a media devoted to trashing him. Lord West, a former admiral and Labour minister, put it well. Corbyn was taking an "outrageous" anti-war position "because it gets the unthinking masses to vote for him."

In a debate with leadership challenger Owen Smith, Corbyn was asked by the moderator: "How would you act on a violation by Vladimir Putin of a fellow NATO state?"

Corbyn replied: "You would want to avoid that happening in the first place. You would build up a good dialogue with Russia ... We would try to introduce a demilitarization of the borders between Russia, the Ukraine and the other countries on the border between Russia and Eastern Europe. What we cannot allow is a series of calamitous build-ups of troops on both sides which can only lead to great danger."

Pressed to say if he would authorize war against Russia "if you had to," Corbyn replied: "I don't wish to go to war – what I want to do is achieve a world that we don't need to go to war."

The line of questioning owes much to the rise of Britain's liberal war-makers. The Labour Party and the media have long offered them career opportunities.

For a while the moral tsunami of the great crime of Iraq left them floundering, their inversions of the truth a temporary embarrassment. Regardless of Chilcot and the mountain of incriminating facts, Blair remains their inspiration, because he was a "winner."

Dissenting journalism and scholarship have since been systematically banished or appropriated, and democratic ideas emptied and refilled with "identity politics" that confuse gender with feminism and public angst with liberation and willfully ignore the state violence and weapons profiteering that destroys countless lives in faraway places, like Yemen and Syria, and beckon nuclear war in Europe and

across the world.

The stirring of people of all ages around the spectacular rise of Jeremy Corbyn counters this to some extent. His life has been spent illuminating the horror of war. The problem for Corbyn and his supporters is the Labour Party.

In America, the problem for the thousands of followers of Bernie Sanders was the Democratic Party, not to mention their ultimate betrayal by their great white hope.

In the U.S., home of the great civil rights and anti-war movements, it is Black Lives Matter and the likes of Codepink that lay the roots of a modern version.

For only a movement that swells into every street and across borders and does not give up can stop the warmongers. Next year, it will be a century since Wilfred Owen wrote the following. Every journalist should read it and remember it.

*If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.*

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A Clinton Family Value: 'Humanitarian' War

Exclusive: The transformation of the Democratic Party from the relative "peace party" to a belligerent "war party" occurred during Bill Clinton's presidency and is likely to resume if Hillary Clinton is elected, writes James W Carden.

By James W Carden

The current debate over the future of U.S. foreign policy is largely over whether the U.S. should continue its self-anointed role as the policeman of the world, or whether it might be wise for the next administration to put, in the words of Donald J. Trump, "America First."

On the other hand, Hillary Clinton has repeatedly called for a more active U.S. foreign policy. The 2016 election is shaping up to be, among other things, a battle between the inarticulate isolationism of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton's liberal interventionism. Hers is an approach which came into vogue during the administration of her husband.

During the 1992 campaign, Bill Clinton sought to differentiate himself from President George H.W. Bush by sounding "tough" on foreign policy. At the time, Clinton declared that, unlike Bush, he would "not coddle dictators from Baghdad to Beijing."

Once in office Clinton departed from policies of his predecessor, whose foreign policy was steered by "realists" such as national security adviser Brent Scowcroft and Secretary of State James A. Baker. Baker's judgment that the war in the Balkans did not merit American intervention – "we don't," said Baker, "have a dog in this fight," was emblematic of the administration's approach, which, despite launching interventions in Iraq and Panama, was for the most part, a cautious one.

Bush outraged *New York Times* columnist William Safire when he warned of the danger that nationalism poses to regional stability. Speaking in Kiev in 1991, Bush promised that "we will not meddle in your internal affairs."

"Some people," he continued, "have urged the United States to choose between supporting President Gorbachev and supporting independence-minded leaders throughout the U.S.S.R. I consider this a false choice."

Such was Bush's wariness over riling Russia that, according to the historian Mary Elise Sarotte, Secretary of State Baker (along with German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, and German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher) "repeatedly affirmed" to the Soviets "that NATO would not move eastward at all."

Bush decided that it was best not to rub Russia's diminished fortunes in its face. Not so President Clinton, who vowed "not let the Iron Curtain be replaced with a veil of indifference." The Clinton team ignored the advice of Senators Bill Bradley, Sam Nunn and Gary Hart and the former Ambassador to the USSR, Jack Matlock, who all urged the administration to reconsider its policy of NATO expansion. Needless to say, predictions that NATO expansion would have dire

consequences for U.S.-Russia relations have come to fruition.

Grandiose Ambitions

Speaking before the U.N. General Assembly in September 1993, President Clinton declared that the U.S. had “the chance to expand the reach of democracy and economic progress across the whole of Europe and to the far reaches of the world.”

At the time, the stars seemed aligned for such a pursuit. In *Foreign Affairs*, neoconservative writer Charles Krauthammer declared that the end of the Cold War was America’s “unipolar” moment. The pursuit of American global hegemony was not, according to Krauthammer, some “Wilsonian fantasy.” It was, rather, “a matter of sheerest prudence.”

During Clinton’s tenure, the U.S. military was dispatched on ostensibly humanitarian grounds in Somalia (1993), Haiti (1994), Bosnia (1995), and Kosovo (1999). Clinton also directed airstrikes on Sudan in what was said to be an attempt on Osama bin Laden’s life.

Clinton bombed Iraq (1998) over its violations of the NATO enforced no-fly zones. That same year, Clinton signed the Iraq Liberation Act into law which stipulated that “It should be the policy of the United States to support efforts to remove the regime headed by Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq.”

In some ways the now deeply embedded belief in the efficacy and rightness of humanitarian intervention dates back to NATO’s intervention in Bosnia in 1995. The success of the Dayton Accords seemed to cement the idea that America was, after all, the indispensable nation in the minds of the Clinton foreign policy team.

The historian David P. Calleo has observed that while the Clinton administration “had always sported a low-grade Wilsonian rhetoric that implied hegemonic ambitions,” it was only after Dayton that “the policy began to imitate the rhetoric.”

The Clinton administration’s second intervention in the Balkans in 1999, set the template for what George W. Bush attempted in Iraq, and, later, what Barack Obama attempted in Libya. Once again, in the absence of U.N. sanction, Clinton launched a war under humanitarian pretexts. The 77-day aerial bombardment of Serbia carried out by NATO was ostensibly undertaken to prevent what was said to be the looming wholesale slaughter of Albanian Kosovars by Serbian forces.

The intervention in Kosovo not only riled the Russians, it also upset American allies. Shortly before the commencement of hostilities in Kosovo, France’s

Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine declared that the United States was not only a superpower, but a “hyper-power.” According to Vedrine, the question of the American hyper-power was “at the center of the world’s current problems.”

Kosovo set a pattern that has held in subsequent interventions in Iraq, Libya and Syria. Advertised (all, or, in part) as interventions on behalf of suffering Muslims, they invariably end up strengthening the hand of those who are declared enemies of the U.S.: Sunni Islamic extremists.

By the end of Bill Clinton’s tenure, the prudence exhibited by George H.W. Bush had long since vanished. Given her record, should Hillary Clinton win in November, the elder Bush’s foreign policy “realism” will have little chance of reappearing.

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com’s [“Yes, Hillary Clinton Is a Neocon.”](#)]

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Kosovo Chaos Undercuts Clinton ‘Success’

Exclusive: President Bill Clinton’s Kosovo war of 1999 was loved by neocons and liberal hawks the forerunner for Iraq, Libya, Syria and other conflicts this century but Kosovo’s political violence and lawlessness today underscore the grim consequences of those strategies even when they “succeed,” writes Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

The insatiable appetite of America’s bipartisan foreign policy elites for military intervention, despite its record of creating failing states in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen, traces back to the marriage of liberal and neoconservative interventionists during the Clinton administration’s 78-day bombing of Serbia to create the break-away state of Kosovo in 1999.

One scholar-advocate has [called](#) NATO’s campaign “The most important precedent supporting the legitimacy of unilateral humanitarian intervention.” Even Sen. [Bernie Sanders](#) was proud to support that use of American power, ostensibly “to

prevent further genocide.”

But Kosovo, which is still not recognized as an independent state by nearly half of all UN members, and which still relies on 4,600 NATO troops to maintain order, is hardly a showcase for the benefits of military intervention. With an unemployment rate of 35 percent, Kosovo is wracked by persistent outbreaks of terrorism, crime, and political violence.

Following a series of violent street protests and wild disruptions of parliament, the leader of the radical nationalist party, VetÅ«vendosje, announced on Feb. 19, “This regime is now is in its final days. They will not last long.”

That day, members of VetÅ«vendosje set off tear gas cannisters in parliament and tussled with police in the latest of their many protests against an agreement reached by the government last summer to grant limited powers to the country’s Serbian minority, in return for Serbia’s recognition of Kosovo. Opposition lawmakers also rail against endemic corruption and the country’s under-performing economy.

Two days earlier, at least 15,000 Kosovars gathered in the central square of Pristina, the country’s capital, to demand the government’s resignation. In January, thousands of protesters clashed with police, hurling Molotov cocktails, setting a major government building and armored police cars on fire, and wounding 24 police officers.

“The aim of this protest was to overthrow the government with violence,” the government said in a statement. The U.S. ambassador chimed in, “Political violence threatens democracy and all that Kosovo has achieved since independence.”

This violence gets little attention from the American media in part because, unlike the Ukrainian demonstrators who overthrew their democratically elected government in 2014, Kosovo’s protesters are targeting a pro-Western government that eagerly seeks membership in the European Union.

But it’s no wonder that Kosovo’s political fabric is so rent by violent confrontations. The rump state was created by a violent secessionist movement led by the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). That guerrilla band of Albanian nationalists was covertly backed by the German secret service to weaken Serbia. Its terrorist attacks on Serbian villages and government personnel in the mid-1990s prompted a brutal military crackdown by Serbia, followed by NATO’s decisive intervention in 1999.

During the fighting the KLA drove tens of thousands of ethnic Serbs from Kosovo

as part of an ethnic cleansing campaign to promote independence for the majority Albanian population. It recruited Islamist militants, including followers of Osama Bin Laden, from Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Afghanistan and other countries.

President Bill Clinton's special envoy to the Balkans, Robert Gelbard, called the KLA "without any question, a terrorist group," and a Council on Foreign Relations backgrounder added, "most of its activities were funded by drug running."

None of that, however, stopped Washington from embracing the KLA's cause against Serbia, a policy spearheaded by the liberal interventionist First Lady Hillary Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Without authorization from the United Nations, NATO began bombing Serbia in March 1999, killing some 500 civilians, demolishing billions of dollars' worth of industrial plants, bridges, schools, libraries and hospitals, and even hitting the Chinese embassy. ("It should be lights out in Belgrade," demanding *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman. "Every power grid, water pipe, bridge, road and war-related factory has to be targeted. Like it or not, we are at war with the Serbian nation.")

Following Serbia's capitulation, according to Human Rights Watch, "elements of the KLA" engaged in "widespread and systematic burning and looting of homes belonging to Serbs, Roma, and other minorities and the destruction of Orthodox churches and monasteries. This destruction was combined with harassment and intimidation designed to force people from their homes and communities. By late-2000 more than 210,000 Serbs had fled the province . . . The desire for revenge provides a partial explanation, but there is also a clear political goal in many of these attacks: the removal from Kosovo of non-ethnic Albanians in order to better justify an independent state."

Former KLA leaders, including its political head Hashim Thaçi, went on to dominate the new Kosovo state. A 2010 report by the Council of Europe declared that Thaçi, who was then Kosovo's prime minister, headed a "mafia-like" group that smuggled drugs, guns and human organs on a grand scale through Eastern Europe. The report's author accused the international community of turning a blind eye while Thaçi's group of KLA veterans engaged in "assassinations, detentions, beatings and interrogations" to maintain power and profit from their criminal activities.

Prime Minister Thaçi and the Kosovo government strenuously denied the allegations and succeeded for years in resisting accountability. Their American friends were eager to put the past behind as well. In 2012, Madeleine Albright and a former Clinton special envoy to the Balkans bid to take control of the country's state-owned telecommunications company despite widespread allegations of corruption, the attempted assassination of the telecommunications regulatory

chief, and the murder of the state privatization agency's chief.

No one seemed immune from corruption. A study of the European Union's own legal mission to Kosovo suggested that its members may have taken bribes to drop investigations of senior Kosovo politicians for rampant criminal activity.

In 2014, a three-year E.U. investigation concluded that "senior officials of the former Kosovo Liberation Army" should be indicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity, including "unlawful killings, abductions, enforced disappearances, illegal detentions in camps in Kosovo and Albania, sexual violence, other forms of inhumane treatment, forced displacements of individuals from their homes and communities, and desecration and destruction of churches and other religious sites."

Under tough pressure from the United States and E.U., Kosovo's parliament finally agreed last summer to permit a special court to prosecute former KLA leaders for war crimes. The court will begin operating this year in The Hague.

"The sad thing is that the United States and European countries knew 10 years ago that Thaçi and his men were engaged in drug smuggling and creating a mafia state," said one European ambassador last year. "The attitude was, 'He's a bastard, but he's our bastard.'"

Whether delayed justice will clean up Kosovo's "mafia state," and whether belated granting of rights to the Serbian minority will ease or aggravate Kosovo's explosive ethnic tensions, remain to be seen. One thing's for sure: a great many people have died in the name of this great "humanitarian intervention," and many more are still suffering for it. Kosovo is no Libya or Syria, but neither is it any kind of showcase for the benefits of U.S. armed intervention.

Jonathan Marshall is author or co-author of five books on international affairs, including *The Lebanese Connection: Corruption, Civil War and the International Drug Traffic* (Stanford University Press, 2012). Some of his previous articles for Consortiumnews were "Risky Blowback from Russian Sanctions"; "Neocons Want Regime Change in Iran"; "Saudi Cash Wins France's Favor"; "The Saudis' Hurt Feelings"; "Saudi Arabia's Nuclear Bluster"; "The US Hand in the Syrian Mess"; and "Hidden Origins of Syria's Civil War."]

KLA Country (A Forewarning from Kosovo)

From the Archive: President Clinton's 1999 air war on Serbia supposedly to stop

genocide in Kosovo became the model for neocon/liberal hawk "humanitarian" wars this century. But as Kosovo descends again into political violence the war also foreshadowed what can go wrong, as Don North reported in this prescient story from 1999.

By Don North (Originally published on Aug. 12, 1999)

Serbia was the NATO's victory in Kosovo expelled the Serb military and stopped the brutal "ethnic cleansing" of the province's Albanian majority. But in a post-war inspection, I found that the pro-Albanian Kosovo Liberation Army is quickly establishing itself as the real power on the ground, sowing the seeds for more violence and corruption ahead.

In effect, the ethnic Albanian guerrilla force emerged from hiding after the Serb withdrawal in June 1999 to claim the spoils of a war in which the KLA never won a battle. Ignoring commitments to disband as a military force, the KLA instead asserted its power by dividing the province into seven KLA regions. The KLA set up roadblocks in areas supposedly under the control of NATO's "KFOR" occupation troops, a clear message to Serbs that the KLA was the province's new master.

Since then, the KLA has been blamed for a new round of "ethnic cleansing," a systematic campaign to transform Kosovo into an ethnic Albanian territory by terrorizing Serbs and Gypsies and driving them into exile. The revenge attacks have included mass murders, destruction of property and the razing of Serb religious shrines.

Even as 37,000 NATO peacekeepers fanned out across Kosovo, the scene on the ground suggested that little could be done to preserve Kosovo as a multi-ethnic home for both Serbs and Albanians. Tens of thousands of Serbs fled with the retreating Serb army and many others have left since the NATO troops arrived. The present Serb population may be fewer than 30,000, down from a pre-war estimate of about 200,000.

The emerging reality is far removed from President Bill Clinton's soaring rhetoric about his hopes for a land free from "anyone who seeks to use racial, religious or ethnic differences to promote hatred." From the moment I arrived in the provincial capital of Pristina on June 14, 1999, it was clear that Kosovo was headed in the opposite direction.

Like other provinces of the former Yugoslavia, Kosovo fast was becoming a place controlled by an intolerant ethnic organization seething with nationalism and revenge. In effect, NATO's air war had created a new Albanian Republic of Kosovo to take its place beside the Balkans' other ethnic territories: Croatian Bosnia,

Muslim Bosnia and the Serb Republic.

NATO found the KLA militants willing to give lip service to the rules of the international occupation but grudging in their follow through, if not outright defiant. In some areas, Russian KFOR troops considered friendly to the Serbs – have come under sniper fire.

In the French-patrolled town of Mitrovica, about 50 miles north of Pristina, a KLA-backed mob stormed across a bridge toward a Serb neighborhood. The mob was pushed back by French troops, with one French soldier seriously injured. Angered by the failed march, KLA leader Hashim Thaci denounced the French troops as “undemocratic and arrogant.”

I witnessed another typical confrontation between a young KLA leader and a U.S. Army colonel in the small village of Kacanik, about 50 miles south of Pristina. The KLA had set up illegal checkpoints on the road, prompting Col. Joe Anderson of New York City, the 82nd Airborne commander in the area, to complain to the young KLA commander, Xhabir Zharku.

“I’ll make it simple for you,” Anderson declared. “If we find anymore checkpoints here, we’re going to apprehend your people. I’m telling you as commander in this zone, it’s not authorized. So we can do it easy or do it hard. But the next checkpoint we come across of any kind, we will apprehend your people. Understand what I’m saying?”

But Xhabir Zharku appeared unfazed by Anderson’s threat. Sitting behind a large desk under the red Albanian flag with a black double-headed eagle crest, the KLA commander defended the use of roadblocks. “These checkpoints are only to register returning residents for health reasons,” Zharku argued.

“That role is not authorized,” Anderson countered.

“I took the mines,” Zharku responded. “Nobody gave us help, and we fought in the mountains. These are our people and this is our country and that means we control it.”

“But you don’t control it,” said Anderson. “For the fifth time, you have no authority for checkpoints. And if I don’t have your cooperation, I’ll move you out, too. I’ll say it one more time, you can assist your people, but security and law enforcement is KFOR’s job.”

In the weeks that followed, KLA militants only continued to stir up more trouble. On July 23, 1999, unidentified gunmen believed to be KLA guerrillas massacred 14 Serb farmers, ages 18 to 63, who were harvesting a field near Gracko, a small farming village just south of Pristina. Overall, about 30 Serbs

a week were dying at the hands of revenge-seeking Albanian Kosovars, human rights observers estimated.

In early August, Human Rights Watch blamed KLA members for a string of murders, kidnappings and beatings directed against Serbs and Gypsies. Though Human Rights Watch did not accuse the KLA leadership of directing the violence, the group condemned the KLA high command for not taking action to stop it.

Beyond the evaporating hopes for a multi-ethnic Kosovo, chances also are disappearing for a multi-party democracy in an Albanian-run Kosovo. The KLA has begun asserting broad authority over the province's economy, politics and security. The KLA seems intent on establishing a one-party Kosovo not unlike the old communist regimes of Serbia and Albania.

As the KLA's consolidates its control, non-violent Albanian Kosovar leader Ibrahim Rugova reportedly fears for his life because of threats from the KLA. The KLA's new dominance could make the idea of free elections in the future a farce.

Since the June cease-fire, an open border with lawless Albania also has allowed organized-crime gangs to relocate in Kosovo, where new opportunities exist because of the shattered society and the prospects of a golden shower of international aid.

The chaos has allowed KLA warlords to expand heroin smuggling routes that run from the Middle East through Kosovo to Europe. Interpol estimated that 40 percent of the heroin traffic into Europe transits Kosovo, a figure that is expected to increase.

The very thin blue line of United Nations police totaling only about 300 in mid-August (1999) with the eventual goal of about 3,000 is arriving to find a Kosovo already in the grip of KLA-connected criminal gangs.

Even Albanian journalists are appalled by what the KLA is doing.

In an interview with *The New York Times*, Baton Haxhiu, editor of *Koha Detore*, an Albanian-language daily, said, "The only political group with any structure is the KLA. They use it to take power, backed by a police they alone will control. It will be hard to turn Albania into Kosovo, but I expect very easy to turn Kosovo into Albania. Each day it is becoming more dangerous to think and speak independently." [NYT, July 29, 1999]

Besides foreshadowing more trouble in the region, the KLA's actions have undercut one of President Clinton's chief arguments for U.S. policy in the troubled region, a determination to end the region's ethnic violence.

Even as this new reality becomes apparent, however, Clinton has continued to single out Serb leader Slobodan Milosevic as the villain responsible for the region's "ethnic cleansing."

"I do not believe we should give reconstruction aid to Serbia as long as it rejects democracy and as long as Mr. Milosevic is in power," Clinton asserted on July 30, 1999, during a visit to Sarajevo, the capital of nearby Bosnia. "We have had enough of ethnic cleansing. I did not involve the United States in Bosnia or in Kosovo to hurt Serbian people. We took a stand for the humanity of all people, and against anyone who seeks to use racial, religious or ethnic differences to promote hatred."

But NATO leaders have failed to condemn the ethnic Albanian attacks on Serbs with the same vigor. Taking a more philosophical view after the 14 Serb farmers were killed, British KFOR commander, Gen. Mike Jackson, explained that "attitudes or thinking can't be changed with a soldier."

Since the early 1990s, Milosevic and the Serbs earned themselves the role as the region's "black hats," blamed for the bulk of ethnic violence in the historically divided Balkans. But there was always plenty of blame to go around for the tit-for-tat ethnic fighting.

Still, the prevailing anti-Serb attitude within the international community helped explain why there was so little protest in 1995 when the Croatian Army marched through U.N. lines and expelled several hundred thousand ethnic Serbs from a Serb enclave in Croatia. Thousands of Serb civilians were killed in that round of "ethnic cleansing."

Milosevic and the Serbs became the heavies again when they confronted a rebellious Albanian majority in Kosovo.

Fearing the loss of another piece of historic Serb territory, Milosevic cracked down on the province's autonomy and appealed stridently to Serb nationalism. As tensions mounted, the ethnic Albanians, who had become the overwhelming majority of Kosovo's population, resisted Serb authority.

By early 1998, the KLA had emerged as a troublesome guerrilla force best known for its tendency toward terrorism and its connections to the heroin trade. During 1998, I traveled with KLA forces and felt sympathy toward their resistance to Serb repression, though troubled by many of their tactics.

The KLA's chief accomplishment was to provoke a harsh counterinsurgency campaign by the Serb army and police forces that sent the KLA reeling in a string of bloody confrontations. But the Serbs also took aim at suspected KLA supporters. In some of the worst abuses, Serb soldiers stepped aside and allowed Serb

paramilitary thugs to terrorize the Albanian Kosovars.

By spring 1998, villages considered sympathetic to the KLA were put to the torch, with civilians suffering rape, torture and executions. KLA guerrillas fled into Albania and into the mountains. An uneasy truce existed through the winter, but the KLA regrouped in early 1999. The Serbs retaliated with more brutality.

Led by the United States, NATO demanded the right to intervene inside Yugoslavia and issued what amounted to an ultimatum to Milosevic. When Milosevic balked, NATO launched an air campaign on March 24 against Serb targets in Kosovo and throughout Serbia.

NATO's bombings raised Serbia's nationalistic passions even higher. On the ground, Serb forces inflicted widespread atrocities against ethnic Albanians, while NATO jets accidentally killed thousands of civilians as "collateral damage." All told, about one million Kosovars fled as refugees, roughly one-half of the province's pre-war population.

Faced with unrelenting NATO air attacks and political pressure from his Moscow allies, Milosevic finally capitulated in June, winning only NATO's assurance that Kosovo would remain part of Serbia. Yet, as Milosevic's forces retreated, the KLA quickly advanced toward strategic towns and roadways.

Though considered ineffective in waging guerrilla warfare or when matching up against the regular Serb army, the KLA finally was benefiting from more professional leadership. The KLA had come under the command of a U.S.-trained Croatian Army general, Agim Ceku, who had assisted the 1995 ethnic cleansing of Serbs from Croatia. Besides sharing his experience with the KLA, Gen. Ceku organized a purge of moderate Albanians from the KLA's ranks.

NATO troops also rushed to take up peacekeeping positions, supposedly to protect the civilian populations, both Serb and Albanian. When I reached Kosovo on June 14, 1999, British Gen. Mike Jackson was touring the Serb neighborhoods of Pristina, urging the residents to stay. But many Serbs doubted that NATO could protect them from KLA revenge, a suspicion that was grounded in reality.

Crisscrossing Kosovo, I found that the pattern of law and order in NATO's five occupation zones varied depending on the nationality of the KFOR troops. There were frequent reports of Italian and German troops virtually ignoring their peacekeeping duties in favor of the KLA.

In the southwestern town of Prizren, thousands of armed KLA troops marched in from Albania as the small 200-man force of the German 12th Panzer Division stood aside. In film clips shown on TV in Pristina, some German soldiers were seen

embracing the KLA guerrillas. When Albanian youths stoned a busload of fleeing Serb civilians, the Panzer troops did not unshoulder their rifles.

A BBC-TV crew told me that Albanians torched 20 Serb homes in the western city of Pec as Italian KFOR troops, resplendent in their parrot-feather plumes, looked on. Half of a group of 200 Serb refugees returning from Montenegro immediately decided to turn back.

The British seemed sincere in their peacekeeping efforts but less than aggressive. In Pristina, British troops tried to disarm about 50 KLA fighters holed up in one apartment building. Three hours of negotiations led to a standoff with the KLA guerrillas allowed to keep their AK-47s and the British explaining that the goal was to "disarm" the KLA's "command and control," rather than just collect guns.

South of Pristina, near Gnjilane, the U.S. Marines from the 26th Expeditionary Force took "disarming" more literally. They stopped a force of 160 KLA guerrillas heading to the village of Zegra. The Marines seized more than 100 AK-47s and assorted other weapons. In another incident, Marines confiscated KLA weapons prompting a torrent of insults from nearby Albanians.

In the 82nd Airborne's territory, Col. Anderson deployed his 4,000 troops with a clear goal of establishing law and order and grabbing as many of the KLA's guns as possible. He showed me a large warehouse where his troops had stacked a motley collection of weapons taken from the KLA. But many rifles were rusted and the AK-47s were in disrepair, suggesting that the KLA was keeping its best weapons.

One KLA sub-commander promised to deliver his weapons to the warehouse but had second thoughts. "He decided he would keep his guns against the orders of his senior commanders and mine," Anderson said. "It's an indication that discipline within the KLA ranks is beginning to break down, when subordinates decide to buck their commanders' orders."

Or it was a sign that the KLA commanders were willing to surrender only their old and useless weapons. Other times, NATO succeeded in forcing only cosmetic changes on the KLA. For instance, KFOR's rules prohibited KLA forces from swaggering around villages in their combat fatigues. But many KLA guerrillas simply switched to wearing civilian black shirts, trousers and berets, making them look a bit like a Hitler youth group and still very intimidating.

Whatever the sincerity of NATO's peacekeeping, however, KLA-backed Albanian revenge swept across Kosovo, with widespread reports of beatings, murders and destruction of ancient Serb monasteries. In Vetina, in the American sector,

Capt. Mat McFarlane of Burke, Virginia, said the revenge begins after dark.

“It starts about nightfall,” McFarlane told me. “Homes or barns burning, and shootings. We respond with mobile or foot patrols and try to apprehend the lawbreakers and seize their weapons. There’s really no pattern to it, just Serbs and Albanians staking claims to territory and blaming each other for the violence. They seem to have grown up in an environment of threats and killings as a way of life.”

In Pristina, a few blocks from my apartment, a prominent Serb economic professor and two colleagues were brutally murdered, even as British paratroops patrolled the streets in armored personnel carriers and on foot. The three victims were tied up with duct tape and bludgeoned to death with a hammer.

Other times, the reprisals targeted the small businesses and media outlets that hold a community together. The Vocar market, near Pristina’s Grand Hotel, was run by friendly Serbs who sold groceries at a fair price. But in early July, the store closed after a rock was hurled through its plate-glass window.

The Serb-run Media Centar at the Grand Hotel was another target. Computers and fax machines were stolen. KLA hooligans took over the hotel lobby, got drunk and began looting. The Media Centar’s director, Radovan Urosevic, soon left for Greece, while his partner, Milivoje Mihalovic, editor of Radio Pristina, turned off the mikes and headed north to Serbia.

Another facet of the Albanian revenge has been to target Serb religious sites. British troops found the Fourteenth Century Monastery of Svete Trojice in Suva Reka completely destroyed. Serbian Orthodox priest Sava Jajic led me to another ancient monastery, a 15th Century structure in Devik, that had suffered KLA looting.

One of the nuns, Sister Anastasia, described how guerrillas from the local KLA chapter smashed religious icons that were several hundred years old. She pointed to a large oil painting of a favorite Orthodox saint which had been defaced by a KLA activist who had carved the group’s initials in Albanian “UCK” into the painting with a bayonet.

Father Sava, known as the “cyber-monk” for his informative e-mails sent around the world, protected Albanians in his own monastery in Decani during the Serb “ethnic cleansing” campaigns. Because of that, he has seen Albanians return the favor by defending the monastery from retaliation.

“If they [the KLA] are going to kill the monks, they [the KLA] must kill us first,” said Shaban Bruqi, an Albanian villager. “They [the monks] saved us.”

On July 2, 1999, Father Sava joined with a small group of Serb and Albanian leaders issuing a joint statement seeking reconciliation.

“We want to realize our joint goal of a civil society in Kosovo, a society where no one has to fear for his life, his family, his job or his home because of his ethnicity or belief,” the communique read. “The road to reconciliation will be long and difficult. There is no such thing as natural hatred among people in Kosovo.”

But that night, a less-forgiving attitude was on display in Pristina. Celebrating the ninth anniversary of an Albanian declaration of independence for Kosovo, thousands of Albanian Kosovar youths drove through the streets waving Albanian flags and firing AK-47s. The shooting continued until 3 a.m.

Despite the best hopes of many well-intentioned citizens from both ethnic groups and the brave peacekeeping efforts of some NATO troops, the future of Kosovo seems headed in a very different direction than Father Sava or President Clinton might hope.

Rather than a multi-cultural society living in peace, Kosovo likely will be dominated by KLA gunmen determined to purge the province’s centuries-old Serb ethnic presence. As a consequence of NATO’s military intervention, Kosovo appears to have traded the brutality of Serb paramilitary thugs for the brutality of like-minded Albanians.

With corrupt warlords vying for control, Kosovo seems headed for a future that resembles more Albania or Chechnya than some Western-style democracy.

Don North is a veteran war correspondent who covered the Vietnam War and many other conflicts around the world. He is the author of a new book, *Inappropriate Conduct*, the story of a World War II correspondent whose career was crushed by the intrigue he uncovered.

Other historic reporting on the Kosovo crisis from Consortiumnews.com:

“Why Kosovo?” by Don North. Originally published Nov. 6, 1998. The early days of the war and what the two sides were fighting over.

“Irony at Racak: Tainted U.S. Diplomat Condemns Massacre” by Don North. Originally published Jan. 26, 1999. An American condemnation of a Serb massacre in Kosovo recalls U.S. ambivalence about massacres in Central America.

“Wag the Dog in Reverse” by Mollie Dickenson, Originally published May 4, 1999. Bill Clinton’s political crisis over sex distracts from a real war in the Balkans.

“Television Wars” by Don North, Originally published May 4, 1999. NATO intentionally bombs a Serb TV station.

“Target Yugoslavia” by Robert Parry, Originally published May 4, 1999. The Clinton administration tries out high-tech info-war tactics on the Serbs.

US/NATO Embrace Psy-ops and Info-War

Exclusive: The U.S. government and NATO have entered the Brave New World of “strategic communications,” merging psy-ops, propaganda and P.R. in order to manage the perceptions of Americans and the world’s public, reports veteran war correspondent Don North.

By Don North

As reflected in a recent NATO conference in Latvia and in the Pentagon’s new “Law of War” manual, the U.S. government has come to view the control and manipulation of information as a “soft power” weapon, merging psychological operations, propaganda and public affairs under the catch phrase “strategic communications.”

This attitude has led to treating psy-ops manipulative techniques for influencing a target population’s state of mind and surreptitiously shaping people’s perceptions as just a normal part of U.S. and NATO’s information policy.

“The NATO case and argument is that NATO’s approach to psy-ops is to treat it as an essentially open, truthful and benign activity and that, plus the elimination of any meaningful distinctions between domestic and foreign media institutions and social media, means that psy-ops and public affairs have effectively fused,” said British military historian, Dr. Stephen Badsey, one of the world’s leading authorities on war and the media.

Badsey said NATO has largely abandoned the notion that there should be a clear distinction between psy-ops and public affairs, although NATO officially rules out the dissemination of “black propaganda,” knowingly false information designed to discredit an adversary.

“The long argument as to whether a firewall should be maintained between psy-ops and information activities and public affairs has now largely ended, and in my view the wrong side won,” Badsey added.

And, as part of this Brave New World of “strategic communications,” the U.S. military and NATO have now gone on the offensive against news organizations that present journalism which is deemed to undermine the perceptions that the U.S. government seeks to convey to the world.

That attitude led to the Pentagon’s new “Law of War” manual which suggests journalists in wartime may be considered “spies” or “unprivileged belligerents,” creating the possibility that reporters could be subject to indefinite incarceration, military tribunals and extrajudicial execution the same treatment applied to Al Qaeda terrorists who are also called “unprivileged belligerents.” [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“Pentagon Manual Calls Some Reporters Spies.”](#)]

The revised “Law of War” manual has come under sharp criticism from representatives of both mainstream and independent media, including The New York Times’ editors and the Committee to Protect Journalists, as well as academics such as Dr. Badsey.

“The attitude toward the media expressed in the 2015 Pentagon manual is a violation of the international laws of war to which the USA is a signatory, going back to the 1907 Hague Convention, and including the Geneva Conventions,” said Badsey, a professor of conflict studies at Wolverhampton University in the United Kingdom and a long-time contact of mine who is often critical of U.S. military information tactics.

“But [the manual] is a reflection of the attitude fully displayed more than a decade ago in Iraq where the Pentagon decided that some media outlets, notably Al Jazeera, were enemies to be destroyed rather than legitimate news sources.”

The Vietnam Debate

The Pentagon’s hostility toward journalists whose reporting undermines U.S. government propaganda goes back even further, becoming a tendentious issue during the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 1970s when the war’s supporters accused American journalists of behaving treasonously by reporting critically about the U.S. military’s strategies and tactics, including exposure of atrocities such as the My Lai massacre.

In the 1980s, conservatives in the Reagan administration embracing as an article of faith that “liberal” reporters contributed to the U.S. defeat in Vietnam moved aggressively to discredit journalists who wrote about human rights violations by U.S.-backed forces in Central America. In line with those hostile attitudes, news coverage of President Ronald Reagan’s invasion of Grenada in 1983 was barred, and in 1990-91, President George H.W. Bush tightly controlled journalists trying to report on the Persian Gulf War. By keeping out or keeping

a close eye on reporters, the U.S. military acted with fewer constraints and abuses went largely unreported.

This so-called “weaponizing of information” turned even more lethal during the presidency of Bill Clinton and the war over Kosovo when NATO identified Serb TV as an enemy “propaganda center” and dispatched warplanes to destroy its studios in Belgrade. In April 1999, acting under orders from U.S. Army General Wesley Clark, American bombers fired two cruise missiles that reduced Radio Televizija Srbija to a pile of rubble and killed 16 civilian Serb journalists working for the government station.

Despite this willful slaughter of unarmed journalists, the reaction from most U.S. news organizations was muted. However, an independent association of electronic media in Yugoslavia condemned the attack.

“History has shown that no form of repression, particularly the organized and premeditated murder of journalists, can prevent the flow of information, nor can it prevent the public from choosing its own sources of information,” the group said.

The (London) Independent’s Robert Fisk remarked at the time, “once you kill people because you don’t like what they say, you change the rules of war.” Now, the Pentagon is doing exactly that, literally rewriting its “Law of War” manual to allow for the no-holds-barred treatment of “enemy” journalists as “unprivileged belligerents.”

Despite the 1999 targeting of a news outlet in order to silence its reporting, a case for war crimes was never pursued against the U.S. and NATO officials responsible, and retired General Clark is still a frequent guest on CNN and other American news programs.

Targeting Al Jazeera

During the presidency of George W. Bush, the Arab network Al Jazeera was depicted as “enemy media” deserving of destruction rather than being respected as a legitimate news organization and the news network’s offices were struck by American bombs. On Nov. 13, 2001, during the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, a U.S. missile hit Al Jazeera’s office in Kabul, destroying the building and damaging the homes of some employees.

On April 8, 2003, during the U.S. invasion of Iraq, a U.S. missile hit an electricity generator at Al Jazeera’s Baghdad office, touching off a fire that killed reporter Tareq Ayyoub and wounding a colleague. The Bush administration insisted that the attacks on Al Jazeera offices were “accidents.”

However, in 2004, as the U.S. occupation of Iraq encountered increased resistance and U.S. forces mounted a major offensive in the city of Fallujah, Al Jazeera's video of the assault graphically depicted the devastation and on April 15, 2004, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld decried Al Jazeera's coverage as "vicious, inaccurate and inexcusable."

According to [a British published report](#) on the minutes of a meeting the next day between President Bush and UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, Bush suggested bombing Al Jazeera's headquarters in Qatar but was talked out of the idea by Blair who said it would provoke a worldwide backlash.

During the Iraq War, Dr. Badsey wrote the following observation which I cited in my book on military/media relations, *Inappropriate Conduct*: "The claim that in 2004 at the first battle of Fallujah the U.S. Marine Corps 'weren't beaten by the terrorists and insurgents, they were beaten by Al Jazeera television' rather than that they [U.S. forces] employed inappropriate tactics for the political environment of their mission, is recognizable as yet another variant on the long-discredited claim that the Vietnam War was lost on the television screens of America."

Although the notion of Vietnam-era journalists for U.S. media acting as a fifth column rather than a Fourth Estate is widely accepted among conservatives, the reality was always much different, with most of the early Vietnam War coverage largely favorable, even flattering, before journalists became more skeptical as the war dragged on.

In a recent interview on NPR radio, Charles Adams, a senior editor of the new "Law of War" manual, was unable to cite examples of journalists jeopardizing operations in the last five wars and that may be because there were so few examples of journalistic misconduct and the handful of cases involved either confusion about rules or resistance to news embargoes that were considered unreasonable.

Examining the history of reporters dis-accredited during the Vietnam War, William Hammond, author of a two-volume history of U.S. Army relations with the media in Vietnam, found only eight dis-accreditations, according to military files.

Arguably the most serious case involved the Baltimore Sun's John Carroll, an Army veteran himself who believed strongly that it was important that the American people be as thoroughly informed about the controversial war as possible. He got in trouble for reporting that the U.S. Marines were about to abandon their base at Khe Sahn. He was accused of violating an embargo and was stripped of his credentials, though he argued that the North Vietnamese

surrounding the base were well aware of the troop movement.

Toward the end of the war, some reporters also considered the South Vietnamese government so penetrated by the communists that there were no secrets anyway. Prime Minister Nguyen van Thieu's principal aide was a spy and everyone knew it except the American people.

During his long career, which included the editorship of the Los Angeles Times, Carroll came to view journalists "almost as public servants and a free press as essential to a self-governing nation," according to his obituary in The New York Times after his death on June 14, 2015.

Strategic Communication

During the Obama administration, the concept of "strategic communication" managing the perceptions of the world's public has grown more and more expansive and the crackdown on the flow of information unprecedented. More than any of his predecessors, President Barack Obama has authorized harsh legal action against government "leakers" who have exposed inconvenient truths about U.S. foreign policy and intelligence practices.

And Obama's State Department has mounted a fierce public campaign against the Russian network, RT, that is reminiscent of the Clinton administration's hostility toward Serb TV and Bush-43's anger toward Al Jazeera.

Since RT doesn't use the State Department's preferred language regarding the Ukraine crisis and doesn't show the requisite respect for the U.S.-backed regime in Kiev, the network is denounced for its "propaganda," but this finger-pointing is really just part of the playbook for "information warfare," raising doubts about the information coming from your adversary while creating a more favorable environment for your own propaganda. [See Consortiumnews.com's ["Who's the Propagandist? US or RT?"](#)]

This growing fascination with "strategic communication" has given rise to NATO's new temple to information technology, called "The NATO Strategic Communications Center of Excellence" or STRATCOM, located in Latvia, a former Soviet republic that is now on the front lines of the tensions with Russia.

On Aug. 20, some of the most influential minds from the world of "strategic communications" gathered in Latvia's capital of Riga for a two-day conference entitled "Perception Matters." A quotation headlined in all its communications read: "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed" noble sentiments perhaps but not always reflected in the remarks by more than 200 defense and communications experts, many of whom viewed information not as some neutral factor necessary for

enlightening the public and nourishing democracy, but as a “soft power” weapon to be wielded against an adversary.

Hawkish Sen. John McCain, R-Arizona, led a delegation of U.S. senators and said STRATCOM was needed to combat Russia and its President Vladimir Putin. “This Center will help spread the truth,” said McCain although “the truth” in the world of “strategic communications” can be a matter of perception.

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