

AGAINST ALL REASON

Propaganda, Politics, Power

ISSN 1741-0754 Volume 1, 2003: 15-28

Original Article

PROPAGANDA SYSTEM NUMBER ONE:
From Diem and Arbenz to Milosevic

By Edward S. Herman
University of Pennsylvania

The way in which the mainstream media have handled the turning of Milosevic over to the Hague Tribunal once again reinforces my belief that the United States is not only number one in military power but also in the effectiveness of its propaganda system, which is vastly superior to any past or present state-managed system. The main characteristic of the U.S. model is that, while offering diversity on many subjects, on core issues--like "free trade" and the need for a huge "defense" establishment--and on the occasions when the corporate and political establishment needs their service--as in legitimating George W. Bush's presidency in the wake of an electoral *coup d'etat*, or supporting the "sanctions of mass destruction" on Iraq--the media can be relied on to expound and propagandize what would be called a "party line" if done in China. They do sometimes depart from the official position as regards tactics, arguing, for example, that the government is not attacking the enemy with sufficient ferocity (Iraq and Yugoslavia), or that the cost of the enterprise is perhaps excessive (the Vietnam war, from 1968), but that the enemy is truly evil and the national cause meritorious is never debatable. The debates over tactics helpfully obscure the agreement on ends.

A further important feature of the U.S. system is that this propaganda service is provided without government censorship or coercion, by self-censorship alone, with the truth of the propaganda line internalized by the numerous media participants. This internalization of belief makes it possible for media personnel to be enthusiastic spokespersons in pushing the party line, thereby giving it a naturalness that is lacking in crude systems of government-enforced propaganda.

A third feature of the system is that the party lines are regularly supported by non-governmental and self-proclaimed "non-partisan" thinktanks like the American Enterprise Institute and Independent International Commission on Kosovo, non-governmental organizations like the Open Society Institute and Human Rights Watch, and assorted ex-leftists and liberal and left journals that on particular sub-

jects "see the light." These organizations are commonly funded by interests (and governments) with an axe to grind, and they serve those interests, but the media feature them as non-partisan and give special attention to the ex-leftists and dissidents who now see the light. This helps firm up the consensus and further marginalizes those still in darkness.

A final feature of the U.S. system is that it works so well that a sizable fraction of the public doesn't recognize the media's propaganda role, and accepts the media's own self-image as independent, adversary, truth-seeking, and helping the public to "assert meaningful control over the political process" (former Supreme Court Justice Lewis Powell). This public bamboozlement is aided by the facts that the media are fairly numerous, are not government controlled, have many true believers among their editors and journalists (the second characteristic), are supported by NGOs and elements of the "left" (the third feature), and regularly proclaim their independence and squabble furiously with government and among themselves. Even those who doubt the media's claims of truth-seeking are often carried along, or confused, by the force and self-assurance of the participants in this great propaganda machine.

Party Line Consensus

An important operational characteristic of the system, which facilitates general adherence to the party line without overt coercion, is the assurance and speed with which the line is established as a consensus truth, so that deviations and dissent quickly take on the appearance of foolishness or pathology, as well as suspiciously unpatriotic behavior. Noam Chomsky and I found that the very asking of questions about the numerous fabrications, ideological role, and absence of any beneficial effects for the victims in the anti-Khmer Rouge propaganda campaign of 1975-1979 was unacceptable, and was treated almost without exception as "apologetics for Pol Pot."

That "free trade" is beneficial and in the "national interest" whereas "protectionism" is hurtful and a creature of "special interests" is a consensus party line of the mainstream media today that profoundly biases their treatment of trade agreements and protests against corporate globalization at Seattle, Washington, D.C., Quebec City, and Genoa (see Herman, "NAFTA, Mexican Meltdown, and the Propaganda System," chapter 14 in *Myth of the Liberal Media*; Rachel Coen, "For Press, Magenta Hair and Nose Rings Defined Protests," *EXTRA!* [July-August 2000]; FAIR, "Action Alert: Police Violence in Genoa--Par for the Course? Media complacency helps normalize assaults on demonstrators," July 26, 2001).

The consensus around a party line is very quickly established in dealing with in-

ternational crises. Once an enemy is demonized—from Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam and Jacobo Guzman Arbenz in Guatemala in the early 1950s to Slobodan Milosevic in the 1990s and up to today—the media display a form of hysteria that helps mobilize the public in support of whatever forms of violence the government wishes to carry out. They become a virtual propaganda arm of the government, joining with it in the common fight against "another Hitler." Under these conditions remarkable structures of disinformation can be built, institutionalized, and remain parts of historic memory even in the face of ex post confutations, which are kept out of sight.

Let me give a few short illustrations before showing how this exceptional propaganda service applies to the Milosevic/Tribunal case.

Red Threat as Party Line: Vietnam and Guatemala

In the Cold War years, propaganda service and mobilization of the public was commonly framed around the Red Threat. This general demonization of the target produced the requisite hysteria and media identification with "us" and complete loss of critical capability. When the U.S.-imported puppet to South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem, won a plebiscite in 1954 with over 99 percent of the votes, an outcome that would elicit much sarcasm if realized in an enemy state, this was not news here. And from then onward, U.S. support of a government admittedly lacking an indigenous constituency, relying on state terror and U.S. financial and military aid, was treated in the mainstream media as entirely reasonable and just.

The self-deception and patriotic biases internalized by media personnel were displayed in their 100 percent inability, from 1954 to today, to call the U.S. intervention and ultimate direct invasion of Vietnam either an "invasion" or "aggression." It was also beautifully illustrated in James Reston's Orwellian statement of 1965 that the United States, which from beginning to almost the very end believed it could impose its preferred rulers by virtue of its superior military power, was in Vietnam to establish the "principle...that no state shall use military force or the threat of military force to achieve its political objectives."

Another remarkable case of propaganda service occurred as the United States destabilized Guatemala's democratic government in the years 1950-1953 and then removed it by means of a U.S.-organized "contra" invasion in 1954. U.S. hostility began when this government passed a law in 1947 allowing the organization of unions, and active destabilization followed and accelerated upon its attempt to engage in moderate land reforms, partly at the expense of the United Fruit Company. From 1947 the search was on for "communists" to explain the reformist policies and to rationalize the hostile intervention. The U.S. mainstream media

became completely hysterical over this Red Threat from 1950 onward, very worried that Arbenz would not allow elections to take place in 1951--this same media had not been bothered by the Ubico dictatorship, 1931-44, and was entirely unconcerned with the absence of democracy from 1954 onward--and featured a stream of alarming reports on Red influence in that country and an alleged "reign of terror." There were endless headlines in the *New York Times* like "Soviet Agents Plotting to Ruin Unity, Defenses of America" (June 22, 1950); "Guatemalan Reds Seek Full Power" (May 21, 1952); "How Communists Won Control of Guatemala" (March 1, 1953), and even *The Nation* ran a sleazy putdown of the democratic government under attack (March 18, 1950).

This was all hysterical nonsense--even Court historian Ronald Schneider, after reviewing the documents seized from the Reds in Guatemala, concluded that the Reds had never controlled Guatemala, and that the Soviet Union "made no significant or even material investment in the Arbenz regime" and paid little attention to Central America--but it was effective in making the overthrow of an elected government acceptable to the U.S. public. And the media's propaganda service was completed by their long cover-up of the hugely undemocratic aftermath of the successful termination of the brief democratic experiment (on the history of this propaganda campaign, Edward Herman, "Returning Guatemala to the Fold," in Gary Rawnsley, ed., *Cold-War Propaganda in the 1950s* [Macmillan, 1999]; more broadly, Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope* [Princeton, 1991]). No government-managed propaganda system could have done a better job of mobilizing the public on the basis of systematic disinformation; and the achievement here is especially impressive given the fact that it was all done with the aim and effect of ending a liberal democracy by violence and installing a terror state.

Bulgarian Connection

Another illustration of outstanding, even remarkable, propaganda service, and one pertinent to the ongoing Milosevic-Tribunal drama because it involved a judicial proceeding, was the "Bulgarian Connection." The Reagan administration had been anxious to demonize the Soviet Union in the early and mid-1980s, and the assassination attempt against Pope John Paul II in May 1981, provided an opportunity to pin the attempt on the KGB and their Bulgarian client. The Turkish fascist, Mehmet Ali Agca, who had shot the Pope, had spent time in Bulgaria (along with ten other countries). After 17 months in prison in Italy, and after numerous visits by secret service, judicial, and papal personnel, who had admittedly offered him inducements to "confess," he claimed that he was on the Bulgarian-KGB payroll, had cased the joint with Bulgarian officials in Rome, and had visited one of them in his apartment. Although the case was laughably implausible, the U.S. mainstream media bought it with enthusiasm, and failed to acknowledge their gul-

libility and propaganda role even after CIA professionals told congress during the CIA confirmation hearings on Robert Gates in 1991 that they knew the Connection was false because, among other reasons, they had penetrated the Bulgarian secret services.

A very important feature of the media's treatment of the Bulgarian Connection, very similar to that which they apply now to the Hague Tribunal in its pursuit of Milosevic, was their pretense that the Italian judiciary, police and political system were only seekers after truth and justice, even a bit fearful of finding the Bulgarians guilty. The *New York Times* even editorialized that the Reaganites were aghast at the implications of a Soviet involvement in the assassination attempt ("recoiled from the devastating implication that Bulgaria's agents were bound to have acted only on a signal from Moscow," Oct. 30, 1984), a propaganda lie confuted by the CIA professionals in 1991, who explained that their own doubts were overruled by the Reaganite leaders of the CIA who insisted on pushing the Connection as true. The Bulgarian Connection can be well explained by the exceptional corruption of the Italian system and the service of this manufactured connection to the Cold Warriors serving the Italian state (and their U.S. parent). This explanation was expressed often in the Italian media during the 1980s, but not in the U.S. mainstream media where, with only insignificant exceptions, the propaganda line functioned without a hitch. (See Herman and Brodhead, *Rise and Fall of the Bulgarian Connection*, chap. 7.)

Hague Tribunal: Serving Us, So No Awkward Questions, Please!

In the case of the Hague Tribunal also, the mainstream media portray it as a presumably unbiased judicial body seeking justice with an even hand, despite the massive evidence that it is a political and propaganda arm of the United States and other NATO powers. Its ultimate propaganda service was performed in May, 1999, when the prosecutor of the International Crimes Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), Louise Arbour, announced the indictment of Yugoslav president Milosevic and four associates for war crimes. This was done, hastily, at a time when NATO was increasingly targeting the civilian infrastructure of Yugoslavia in order to hasten that country's surrender. NATO needed this public relations support as a cover for its own war crimes--the Sixth Convention of Nuremberg prohibits and makes a war crime the targeting of civilian facilities not based on "military necessity"--and the ICTY provided it, with the indictment quickly greeted by Albright and James Rubin as justifying NATO's bombing policy.

To my knowledge the U.S. mainstream media have never once suggested that this indictment servicing the NATO war discredited the Tribunal as an independent judicial body. The *New York Times's* Steven Erlanger even explained to Terry

Gross that this indictment displayed Arbour's independence, as she was allegedly fearful that Milosevic would escape punishment in a political deal if she didn't move quickly! (Fresh Air, National Public Radio, July 12, 2001). Erlanger was not alone in offering this imbecile analysis, which not only failed to recognize the indictment's service to NATO's immediate policy needs, but also ignored other evidence of Arbour's and the Tribunal's deference to U.S. and NATO desires.

The media also failed to raise any questions about Arbour's statement of May 24, 1999, that although people are "entitled to the presumption of innocence until they are convicted," she was issuing the indictment because "the evidence...raises serious questions about their suitability to be guarantors of any deal, let alone a peace agreement"--that is, she found them guilty before they were convicted and thought that on this basis she should interfere with any possible political settlement.

On the other hand, Arbour and her successor Carla Del Ponte have never found allies of the NATO powers or the NATO powers themselves worthy of indictment, even when they did exactly the same things for which the NATO targets were indictable. Thus, Serb leader Milan Martić was indicted for launching a rocket cluster-bomb attack on military targets in Zagreb in May 1995, with the very use of cluster bombs cited by the Tribunal as showing the aim of "terrorizing the civilians of Zagreb." But NATO's cluster-bomb raids on Nis on May 7, 1999, far from any military target, and the 48-hour Croat army shelling of civilian targets in the city of Knin during the August 1995 Croat Operation Storm, produced no indictments. Operation Storm, supported by U.S. officials and helped by U.S.-related professional advisers, resulted in large-scale expulsions and the killing of many Serb civilians, but neither Croat leader Tudjman nor the supportive U.S. officials were indicted, and Croat military officials also escaped indictment till Del Ponte recently claimed several in an effort to show her "balance" in the context of the bringing of Milosevic to The Hague. This double standard, which makes a mockery of justice, has been of absolutely no interest to the U.S. mainstream media; and in his long session with Terry Gross on July 12, when asked "What Americans might be brought to stand trial before an international court?," Steven Erlanger failed to come up with a single name for any actions in the Balkans (and Gross did not follow up on his non-response).

Under pressure to address NATO's wartime activities, which had resulted in the deaths of many Serb civilians--estimates run from 500 to 3,000--Tribunal prosecutor Carla Del Ponte issued a report in June 2000, that declared NATO not guilty. But the document supporting this conclusion was not based on any investigation by the Tribunal, and it openly acknowledged a heavy dependence on NATO sources, asserting "that the NATO and NATO countries press statements are

generally reliable and that explanations have been honestly given." Canadian legal scholar and expert on the Tribunal, Michael Mandel, asks: "Can you imagine how many indictments would have been issued against the Serb leadership if the Prosecutor had stopped at the FRY press releases?" But this remarkable Del Ponte report was of no interest to the mainstream media.

Also of no interest to the media is the fact that the Tribunal has been described by John Laughland in the *Times* (London) as "a rogue court with rigged rules" (June 17, 1999). As normal practice it violates virtually every standard of due process: it fails to separate prosecution and judge; it does not accord the right to bail or a speedy trial; it has no clear definition of burden of proof required for a conviction; it has no independent appeal body; it allows a defendant to be tried twice for the same crime; suspects can be held for 90 days without trial; confessions are presumed to be free and voluntary unless the contrary is established by the prisoner; and witnesses can testify anonymously, with hearsay evidence admissible. These points are almost never mentioned in the U.S. mainstream media or considered relevant to the legitimacy of the Tribunal or the likelihood that Milosevic will get a fair trial.

The Tribunal's biased performance follows from the fact that it was organized by the United States and its close allies, is funded by them and staffed with their approval, and depends on them for information and other support. The Tribunal's charter requirements that its expenses shall be provided in the UN general budget (Article 32), and that the Prosecutor shall act independently and not take instructions from any government (Article 16), have been systematically ignored. Gabrielle Kirk McDonald, former president of the Hague Tribunal--before that a director, and now "Special Counsel to the Chairman on Human Rights," of Freeport-McMoRan Copper & Gold Inc., a notorious human rights violator working in Iranian Jaya with the cooperation of the Indonesian army--stated in 1999 that Tribunal personnel regard Madeleine Albright as the "mother of the tribunal." NATO PR man Jamie Shea pointed out in a May 17, 1999 press conference in Brussels that Arbour will investigate "because we will allow her to;" that the NATO countries are the ones "that have provided the finance to set up the Tribunal;" that they are the ones who do the leg work "and have been detaining indicted war criminals"; and that when she "looks at the facts she will be indicting people of Yugoslav nationality" and not folks from NATO.

But neither this open admission that the NATO powers controlled the Tribunal, nor the evidence of serious abuses of the judicial process that has characterized its work, have been of interest to the mainstream media. As with the prosecution of the Bulgarian Connection, the Hague Tribunal is servicing the U.S. government and its aims, and the media therefore regard any bias or political service as rea-

sonable and take them as givens. Because of their internalized belief that their country is good and would only support justice, the media can't even imagine that any conflict of interest exists. This is deep bias.

Also, no questions come up in this context as to why there are no tribunals for Suharto, Wiranto (the Indonesian general in charge of the destruction of East Timor in 1999), or Ariel Sharon. These are our allies, even if major state terrorists, who received and still receive our support, so that in a well-managed propaganda system the failure to mention their exclusion from a system of global enforcement of the new ethical order opposed to ethnic cleansing and human rights violations is entirely appropriate.

Disinformation as Consensus History: Milosevic and the Balkans

From the time the U.S. government decided to target Milosevic and the Serbs as the root of Balkan evil in the early 1990s, the U.S. propaganda system began its work of demonization of the target, enhanced atrocities management, and the necessary rewriting of history. The integration of government needs and media service was essentially complete, and was beautifully symbolized by the marriage during the crisis years of State Department PR chief James Rubin and Christiane Amanpour, CNN's main reporter on the Kosovo war, whose reports could have come from Rubin himself. More recently, in connection with Milosevic's transfer to the Hague, Amanpour entertained Richard Holbrooke on the subject, and the two, speaking as old comrades-in-arms congratulated one another on a joint success, just as a policy-enforcing official might express mutual congratulations with a PR officer (Holbrooke applauded Amanpour's "fantastic coverage of the war throughout the last decade" [CNN *Live At Daybreak*, June 29, 2001]).

It should be noted that Holbrooke visited Zagreb two days before Croatia launched Operation Storm in August 1995, almost certainly talking over and giving U.S. approval to the imminent military operation, reminiscent of Henry Kissinger's visit to Jakarta just before Indonesia's invasion of East Timor in September 1975. As Operation Storm involved a major program of killings and expulsions, with killings greatly in excess of the numbers attributed to Milosevic in the Tribunal indictment of May 22, 1999, an excellent case can be made that Holbrooke should be being tried for war crimes. We may also be sure that Christiane Amanpour's "fantastic coverage" of the wars in Yugoslavia did not deal with Operation Storm or mention Holbrooke's and the U.S. role in that butchery and massive ethnic cleansing.

As NATO prepared to go to war, which began on March 24, 1999, the media followed the official lead in focusing heavily on Serb atrocities in Kosovo, with

great and indignant attention to the Racak massacre of January 15, 1999. The failure of the Rambouillet Conference they blamed on Serb intransigence, again following the official line. During the 87-day bombing war the media focused even more intensively on atrocities (Serb, not NATO), and passed along the official estimates of 100,000 Kosovo Albanian murders (U.S. Defense Secretary William Cohen), and other estimates, smaller and larger. They also accepted the claim that the Serb violence that followed the bombing would have taken place anyway, by plan, so that the bombing, instead of causing the escalated violence was justified by its occurrence *ex post*.

In the post-bombing era a number of developments have occurred that have challenged the official line. But the mainstream media have not let them disturb the institutionalized untruths. Let me list some of these and describe the media's mode of deflection.

1. RACAK MASSACRE. The only pre-bombing act of Serb violence listed in the Tribunal indictment of Milosevic on May 22, 1999, was an alleged massacre of Albanians by the Serbs at Racak on January 15, 1999. The Serbs had carried out this action with invited OSCE representatives (and AP photographers) on the scene, but on the following day, after KLA reoccupation of the village, some 40 to 45 bodies were on display for the U.S.-OSCE official William Walker and the media. The authenticity of this massacre, which follows a long pattern of convenient but contrived atrocities to meet a PR need--well described in George Bogdanich's and Martin Lettmayer's brilliant film "The Avoidable War"--was immediately challenged by journalists in France and Germany, but no doubts whatever showed up in the U.S. media. Christophe Chatelet of *Le Monde* was in Racak the day of the "massacre," and left at dusk, as did the OSCE observers and Serb police, without witnessing any massacre. The AP photographers and on-the-scene OSCE representatives have never been available for corroboration or denial, and the forensic report of the Finnish team that examined the bodies at the behest of the OSCE has never been made public. The issue is still contested, but a very strong case can be made that the Racak "massacre" was a staged event (see, Chatelet, in *Le Monde*, Jan. 19, 1999; Professor Dusan Dunjic [a Serb medical participant in the autopsies], "The (Ab)use of Forensic Medicine," <http://www.balkan-archive.org.yu/politics/kosovo/documents/Dunjic0499.html>; J. Raino, et al., "Independent forensic autopsies in an armed conflict: investigation of the victims from Racak, Kosovo," *Forensic Science International* 116 [2001], 171-85).

But the strong challenging evidence has been effectively blacked out in the U.S. mainstream media, and the "massacre" is taken as an established and unquestioned truth (e.g., Amanpour and Carol Lin, *CNN Live at Daybreak*, July 3, 2001;

Steven Erlanger in his July 12 interview with Terry Gross). Why didn't the Serb army remove the incriminating bodies, as the propaganda machine claimed then and now that they were doing as a matter of policy directed from above? As in the case of the analyses and evidence in the 1980s that Agca might have been coached to implicate the Bulgarians and KGB, the U.S. mainstream media refuse to burden a useful party line with inconvenient questions and facts.

Also, while giving heavy, uncritical and indignant attention to Racak, the media have never allowed the far larger and unambiguous massacre of civilians at Liquica in East Timor on April 6, 1999--three months after Racak--to reach public consciousness. This was a massacre by the U.S. ally Indonesia, U.S. officials did not feature it, and the media therefore served national policy by giving it short shrift.

2. U.S. AND NATO OPPOSITION TO SERB "ETHNIC CLEANSING" AND "GENOCIDE" AS THE BASIS OF THE NATO BOMBING. The official and media propaganda line is that the United States and NATO powers were deeply upset by Serb violence in Kosovo and eventually went to war to stop it. But there are problems with this view. For one thing, evidence has turned up showing that Washington, through its own agencies or hired mercenaries, actually aided and trained the KLA prior to the bombing, and in this and other ways encouraged them in provocations that stimulated Serb violence (Peter Beaumont et al., "CIA's bastard army ran riot in Balkans," *The Observer* [London], March 11, 2001). The postwar publication by the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, General Report: Kosovo Aftermath, noted that "Under the influence of the Kosovo Verification Mission the level of Serbian repression eased off" in late 1998, but "on the other hand, there was a lack of effective measures to curb the UCK [KLA]" which had an interest in "worsening the situation." In short, U.S. policy before the bombing encouraged violence in Kosovo. The evidence for this has been made public abroad, but it has not yet surfaced in the U.S. mainstream media.

A second problem is that NATO supplied greatly inflated estimates of Serb killings and expulsions in Kosovo, quite obviously trying to prepare the ground for bombing. The claim that Serbian policy constituted "ethnic cleansing" and even "genocide" has long been confuted by OSCE, State Department, and human rights groups' findings of limited and targeted Serb violence, and by disclosure of an internal German Foreign Office report that even denies the appropriateness of the use of "ethnic cleansing" to describe Serb behavior ["Important Internal Documents from Germany's Foreign Office," http://www.balkan-archive.org.yu/kosovo_crisis/documents/ger_gov.html]. These contesting points of evidence, even though coming from establishment sources, are not only off the screen for the mainstream media, they are ignored and the old lies are repeated by

Christopher Hitchens in *The Nation* ("Body Count in Kosovo," June 11, 2001) and Bogdan Denitch in *In These Times* ("Citizen of a Lost Country," May 14, 2001).

A third problem is: how could this humanitarian motive be driving Clinton and Blair in Kosovo when they had both actively supported Turkey's far larger-scale ethnic cleansing of Kurds throughout the 1990s? The mainstream media dealt with this and similar problems by not letting the issue be raised.

3. NATO REASONABLENESS, SERB INTRANSIGENCE AT RAMBOUILLET. On the question of negotiations versus the use of force, the official line has been that the NATO powers made reasonable negotiating offers to the Serbs, trying to get "Serbia and the Kosovo Albanians to come to a compromise" (Tim Judah), but that the Serb refusal to negotiate led to the bombing war. This line was demonstrated to be false when it was disclosed that NATO had inserted a proviso demanding full occupation by NATO of all of Yugoslavia, admitted by a State Department official to have been a deliberate "raising of the bar" to allow bombing (George Kenney, "Rolling Thunder: The Rerun," *The Nation*, June 14, 1999). This disclosure has been comprehensively suppressed in the mainstream media, allowing the propaganda lie to be repeated today (Judah's repetition of the lie was on June 29, 2001).

4. SERB GENOCIDE BY PLAN DURING THE NATO BOMBING. Three big lies expounded during the NATO bombing war were that (1) the Serbs were killing vast numbers; (2) they were doing this and expelling still larger numbers in a process of "ethnic cleansing" and "genocide;" and (3) that they had planned mass killing and expulsions anyway, so that these could not be attributed to the bombing war or the kind of fighting and atrocities characteristic of a brutal civil war. It is now clear that while large numbers did flee, this included at least an equal proportion of Serbs, and that many fled without forcible expulsion; and it is also clear that while there were brutal killings, these fell far short of the 10,000-500,000 claimed by NATO. It is also now on the record that NATO and the KLA were engaged in joint military actions during the bombing war, and that expulsions were concentrated in areas of KLA strong support, pointing to a military logic to Serb actions (Daniel Pearl and Robert Block, "War in Kosovo Was Cruel, Bitter, Savage; Genocide It Wasn't," *Wall Street Journal*, Dec. 31, 1999). The claim that the Serbs intended to do this anyway has never been supported by any evidence.

In Guatemala after 1947 the search was on for communists; in Kosovo during and after the bombing war the search was on for dead bodies (whereas there was no interest in or search for dead bodies in East Timor after the Indonesian massacres of 1999, in accord with the same propaganda service). The bodies found in Kos-

ovo received great publicity, but the fact that this immense effort yielded only 3-4000 bodies from all causes and on all sides, and the fact that it fell far short of the NATO-media propaganda claims during the bombing war, has received minimal attention. However, with Milosevic now transferred to The Hague, and a fresh demand arising for bodies whose deaths can be attributed to him, once again the media are coming through with fresh claims of bodies transferred from Kosovo under the villain's direction.

5. WAR A SUCCESS, REFUGEES RETURNED TO KOSOVO. But the refugees were produced by the NATO bombing policy itself, and they returned to a shattered country. Furthermore, after the NATO war there was a REAL ethnic cleansing--in percentage terms the "largest in the Balkan wars" according to Transnational Foundation for Peace director Jan Oberg--with some 330,000 Serbs, Roma, Jews, Turks and others driven out of Kosovo, while some 3,000 people were killed and disappeared. However, as this has taken place under NATO auspices, the mainstream media, insofar as they mention the real ethnic cleansing at all, have treated it as a semi-approved "vengeance." But they have mainly dealt with the subject, as they did the post-Arbenz REAL terrorism, by eye aversion.

6. MILOSEVIC AS THE SOURCE OF BALKAN CONFLICT. In virtually all mainstream accounts, it was "Milosevic's murderous decade" (Nordland and Gutman in *Newsweek*, July 9, 2001), Milosevic who "set Yugoslavia to unraveling" (Roger Cohen, *New York Times*, July 1, 2001), "the man who had terrorized the turbulent Balkans for a decade" (*Time*, April 9, 2001). The wars were a "catastrophe that Slobodan Milosevic unleashed" (Tim Judah, *The Times* [London], June 29, 2001). This is comic book history, that follows the standard demonization process, and is refuted by every serious historian dealing with the area (Susan Woodward, Robert Hayden, David Chandler, Lenard Cohen, Raymond Kent, Steven L. Burg and Paul S. Shoup).

Serious history takes into account, among other matters: (1) the fact that long before 1990 Yugoslavia had persistent "deep regional and ethnic cleavages," with Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo "all areas of high ethnic fragmentation" (Lenard Cohen and Paul Warwick, *Political Cohesion in a Fragile Mosaic*), whose suppression required a strong federal state; (2) the effects of the Yugoslav economic crisis, dating back to 1982, and the IMF/World Bank imposition of deflationary policies on Yugoslavia in the late 1980s, and their consequences; (3) the post-Soviet collapse ending of Western support for the Yugoslav federal state, and German and Austrian collaboration in encouraging the Croatian and Slovenian secession from Yugoslavia without any democratic vote and without any settlement on the status of the large Serb minorities; (4) the West's and Western

Badinter Commission's refusal to allow threatened ethnic minorities to withdraw from the new secession states; (5) the U.S. and Western encouragement of the Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina to hold out for unity under their control in the face of Serb and Croatian fears and opposition; (6) the U.S. and NATO support of Croatia and its massive ethnic cleansing of Serbs in Krajina.

The media rarely mention these extremely important external, NATO-inspired causes of ethnic cleansing, or the fact that Milosevic supported many diplomatic initiatives such as the Owen-Vance and Owen-Stoltenberg plans, both unsuccessful because of U.S. encouragement of the Muslims to hold out for more. Heavy German and U.S. responsibility for the breakup of Yugoslavia; the NATO governments' help in the arming of Slovenia, Croatia, the Bosnian Muslims, and the KLA; and the U.S. sabotaging of efforts at negotiated settlements in the early 1990s, are all well documented in Bogdanich's and Lettmayer's "The Avoidable War." The film was shown on the History Channel on April 16, but has otherwise been ignored in *Propaganda System Number One* for good reason: it not only shows dominant NATO responsibility for the Balkan disaster, it makes the mainstream media's supportive propaganda role crystal clear.

7. MILOSEVIC'S NATIONALIST SPEECHES OF 1987 AND 1989. It is now rote "history" that in April 1987 Milosevic "endorsed a Serbian nationalist agenda" at Polje in Kosovo, and did the same there on June 28, 1989--supposedly heralding his project of Greater Serbia and the coming wars to achieve it. People like Roger Cohen and Steven Erlanger who cite these as "inciting Serb passions" almost surely never bothered to read them (nor did Joe Knowles, who mentions Milosevic's "infamous" speech of June 28 in *In These Times* [Aug.6, 2001]). In both speeches, Milosevic actually warns against the dangers of nationalism, and while he promises to protect Serbs, he is clearly speaking of the citizens of the Republic of Serbia, not ethnic Serbs; and he describes "Yugoslavia" as "a multi-national community...[that] can survive only under the conditions of full equality for all nations that live in it" (June 28, 1989).

8. MILOSEVIC AS DICTATOR. The June 28, 2001 amended indictment of Milosevic notes that he was "elected" president of Serbia on May 8, 1989, was elected again "in multi-party elections" held in December 1990, was "reelected" in December 1992, was "elected president of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia" on July 15, 1997, and was defeated and ousted from power in an election in September 2000. But as Milosevic is on the U.S. hit list, he is referred to repeatedly in the media as a "dictator," a word they were extremely reluctant to apply to Suharto during his 32 years as a prized U.S. client. The designation of dictator created a problem for the media because they also found, and continue to find, the Serb populace guilty as "willing executioners" who were properly punished by

bombing and who need to acknowledge their guilt. How a people suffering under a dictatorship and dictator-controlled media could be guilty of crimes committed elsewhere is unexplained, but in the U.S. mainstream media the contradiction remains unchallenged.

9. THE DICTATOR AS RESPONSIBLE KILLER. In *Manufacturing Consent* Chomsky and I showed how in the case of the murder of Jerzy Popiełuszko in communist Poland the media repeatedly sought to prove that the leaders of Poland knew about and were responsible for the killing, whereas in cases where our own leaders or clients are involved, the media are not interested in high level knowledge and responsibility. It was therefore a foregone conclusion that the media would jump on every claim that Milosevic was behind the deaths in the Balkan wars, and as the Tribunal has to confront the need for such proof to convict the demon, the media are working this terrain with vigor. Some of the alleged new evidence is clearly being leaked from the Tribunal itself (e.g., Bob Graham and Tom Walker, "Milosevic Ordered Hiding of Bodies," *Sunday Times* [London], July 8, 2001), a form of propaganda once again revealing that it is not a judicial body but a political instrument. This evidence, which cites the very words used by the dictator in Belgrade in March 1999 instructing his subordinates to commit crimes ("all civilians killed in Kosovo have to be moved to places where they will not be discovered," in *ibid.*), has the odor of NATO-bloc disinformation and should be treated with the utmost scepticism. And we may be sure the media will never ask why, with this instruction, "45 bodies" were left on the ground in Racak for the convenience of William Walker and other NATO propagandists.

Concluding Note

The U.S. propaganda system is at the peak of its powers in the early years of the 21st century, riding the wave of capitalism's triumph, U.S. global hegemony, and the confidence and effective service of the increasingly concentrated and commercialized mainstream media. It is a model propaganda system, its slippages and imperfections adding to its power, given its assured service in times of need. And as described above, in such times its ability to ignore inconvenient facts, swallow disinformation, and work the public over with propaganda can easily compete with--even surpass--anything found in totalitarian systems.

© 2003. Edward S. Herman. Reproduced with permission.

AGAINST ALL REASON