

## Introduction

Philip Hammond and Edward S. Herman

When the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation launched a bombing campaign against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on the evening of 24 March 1999, we were told it was for the best possible motives. Politicians in the Nato bloc maintained that, reluctantly, they had taken military action because diplomacy had failed; because there was an impending 'humanitarian catastrophe'; because Yugoslav forces were committing 'genocidal' acts; because the foreign policy of the leading Nato powers is driven by the highest moral concerns. With very few exceptions, Western journalists uncritically framed the conflict in these terms: Nato was trying to help. This volume aims to challenge the received wisdom, subjecting both the war, and the media coverage it received, to critical scrutiny. The book is organised in three parts: the first deals with the background of Western intervention in the former Yugoslavia; the second with key issues in media coverage; the third with the way the conflict was reported in a number of countries around the world.

### Part One: The West's Destruction of Yugoslavia

The concept of 'humanitarian war' is surely one of the strangest ever coined. Yet today the language of Western foreign policy – now 'ethical foreign policy' – is littered with such oxymoronic phrases. Soldiers are called 'peacekeepers', deliberately destroyed infrastructure and dead civilians are called 'collateral damage', and the occupation of part of a sovereign state by Nato troops and United Nations administrators is referred to as 'liberation'. In her chapter on 'Nato and the New World Order', Diana Johnstone looks at the *Realpolitik* behind the rhetoric, arguing that proclaimed Western ideals have been the window-dressing for geostrategic interests. Kosovo provided Nato with a new *raison d'être*, facilitating US global dominance and undermining the old international order based on the premise of state sovereignty.

This calculated disregard for sovereignty in the name of 'human rights' is also taken up by David Chandler, who sets the Kosovo war in the context of Great Power interference in the Balkans throughout the 1990s. Assessing the record, he demonstrates how outside intervention – far from helping the people of the former Yugoslavia – has only fuelled conflict and sharpened divisions. Chandler also notes the elitist and anti-democratic character of Western policy, whereby the people of the region are assumed to be incapable of self-government. Mirjana Skoco and William Woodger focus on one aspect of this – the assumption that belligerent parties in the West have the right to sit in judgement through the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia. Skoco and Woodger indicate how the Hague Tribunal, although feted by journalists as an independent court, has consistently served as a political tool of the dominant Nato powers.

Finally in this part of the book, Peter Gowan examines the conduct and aftermath of the Kosovo war itself, looking in detail at how manoeuvring by Western powers affected both the way the war was waged and how it was brought to an end. Contrasting Nato's declared goals with the operational aims of the war, Gowan uncovers the diplomatic context – of US relations with other Nato countries, and with Russia – which is indispensable for an understanding of why the war was really fought. He argues that the bombing campaign was a significant, though not unqualified, success for post-Cold War US expansionist aims.

## **Part Two: Seeing the Enemy**

As Johnstone notes, the 'humanitarian war' concept is promoted through the media, which play a vital role in preparing public opinion and acting as cheerleaders and advocates of war. Opening the second part of the book, Richard Keeble develops this point with a review of what he terms the 'new militarist' wars fought in the 1980s and 1990s. Nato's bombing of Yugoslavia was not really 'war' in the conventional sense, Keeble argues, but the devastation and slaughter, by an overwhelmingly superior military alliance, of an enemy demonised by Western officials and journalists. Such 'wars' are media spectacles, manufactured for the militarised societies of Britain and America.

The demonisation of enemies is also examined by Mick Hume, who focuses on the way the Serbs were portrayed as the 'new Nazis', led by a 'new Hitler', committing 'genocide' in both Bosnia and Kosovo. This manipulative process of 'Nazification' not only led to gross distortion of the Bosnian and Kosovo conflicts, it also belittled the Nazi Holocaust by implying it was the equivalent of these local civil wars. While Nato politicians were eager to push the Second World War comparison regarding Kosovo, in doing so they drew on a ready-made image of the Serbs developed by crusading journalists in Bosnia. The 'anti-Nazi' campaigning of Western reporters is driven more by their own search for moral certainties than by the reality of the conflicts themselves, argues Hume.

Though relentlessly denouncing Yugoslav propaganda, Nato politicians maintained that their own countries' media were models of independence and accuracy. Skoco and Woodger look at the evolution of US military strategies of news management, whereby direct control and censorship have given way to a new emphasis on 'working with' the media. The end result is similar, since the new doctrine of 'security at source' means that, though providing an avalanche of 'information', the military themselves control the flow of news, while journalists develop an ever cosier relationship with the Pentagon's Public Affairs officers.

The Nato attacks on the Yugoslav media provide the starting point for Goran Gocic's chapter, which reflects on the information war fought on TV and the Internet. Gocic, a Yugoslav journalist, describes the significance of the symbolic victories won by Serbian television and the 'wired elite' on the

Internet, though he argues that these have to be set against US dominance in the field of global communications.

### **Part Three: Reporting the War around the World**

The series of studies which make up this part of the book begins with the core Nato countries. Seth Ackerman and Jim Naureckas survey US media coverage of the build-up to the bombing and the conflict itself, and Edward S. Herman and David Peterson examine the role of the 24-hour news channel CNN. Both chapters reveal the extraordinary degree to which the mainstream media accepted Nato's language, frames of reference, selections of fact, and rewriting of history in supporting the war. Philip Hammond summarises key issues in the similar propaganda framework developed by the British media, and John Pilger provides specially edited extracts from articles he wrote during and after the bombing. Diana Johnstone traces the contribution of French intellectuals and media commentators in promoting the ideology of 'humanitarian intervention', both during the Bosnian war and the Kosovo air campaign. Thomas Deichmann reveals how German journalists swept democratic debate aside in their eagerness to embrace the 'ethical foreign policy' of bombing.

A similar lack of debate was evident in Norwegian politics and press reporting, argues Karin Trandheim Røn. Although Norway played a negligible military role, many Norwegian reporters were enthusiastic supporters of war, uncritically reproducing Nato propaganda and going out of their way to adopt a patriotic angle in their coverage. For journalists in Greece, a peripheral Nato ally, there were contradictory pressures: politicians toed the US line while the overwhelming majority of the country's population vigorously demonstrated their opposition to the bombing. Nikos Raptis draws on interviews with correspondents who reported from Belgrade and Kosovo during the war to show how most Greek journalists sided with popular opinion rather than media owners and government.

As the example of Greece suggests, the notion that the whole 'international community' supported the war is a fiction. Coverage in non-Nato countries which opposed the bombing offers a markedly different picture. Analysing Russian press reporting, Philip Hammond, Lilia Nizamova and Irina Saveliyeva describe how, despite political divisions between privately-owned, pro-market newspapers and nationalist or communist titles, there was nevertheless a consensus against the war across all sections of the media. Like Russia, India also felt itself threatened by Nato's attack on Yugoslavia, and coverage in the country's English-language press combined reports reproduced from Western news agencies with highly critical commentaries and editorials. Raju Thomas provides an overall analysis of the coverage, while *Times of India* correspondent Siddharth Varadarajan gives an insider's perspective. Drawing on his experience of reporting from Yugoslavia and other war zones, Varadarajan recounts how news coverage of international crises is dominated by the official Western world view.

## **The Manichean Struggle**

The media have played a key role in sustaining the idea of 'humanitarian' intervention since the end of the Cold War. Complex conflicts have been simplified into epic battles between Good and Evil; enemies have been demonised; and the Western powers have been lionised as heroic saviours of the world. The price exacted by such 'humanitarianism' has been a heavy one. From Iraq, Somalia and Haiti, to Yugoslavia, the death toll now runs into the hundreds of thousands. In 1999, Nato killed at least as many civilians in its 78 days of 'humanitarian' bombing as the total number of people who died in Kosovo in the twelve months preceding the air war. Unfortunately, we can predict with a great deal of confidence that there will be a 'next time'. But the evidence presented here suggests that whenever we hear talk of the 'ethical' concerns of the 'international community', some critical questions must be asked.