

# HIDING THE HORROR OF "HUMANITARIAN" WARFARE

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## Abstract

This study examines the growth of Britain's secret state and the media's central role in the manufacture of secret, new militarist warfare, taking the Iraq conflict of 1991 and the Kosovo crisis of 1999 as case studies. But it suggests there is no massive elite conspiracy behind these wars; they are the results of complex historical, economic, political and military factors. The institutional and personal links between journalists and the security services are another important factor examined.

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Wars today are conducted in secrecy. Media saturation gives the appearance of total openness and transparency. But the media serve, rather, to hide the reality. As the operations of the secret state have grown since the 1980s so the warfare conducted by the state has grown increasingly secretive. It is a complex though highly significant process which has gone largely unnoticed. Journalists' institutional and personal links with the secret state have helped reinforce this process.

## The Growth of the Secret State

Under Thatcher in Britain and Reagan in the United States secret, authoritarian states emerged alongside increasingly centralised systems of government. As Anthony Sampson commented (1992): "The most pervasive change [under the Conservatives] has been the centralisation of political and financial power. Ironically the prime minister who promised to reduce 'big government' achieved unprecedented concentrations of power which appeared to overwhelm the traditional counterweights." A series of anti-trade union laws reinforced the state's mounting authoritarianism. As Bonefield (1993, 197) argues:

*The government's trade union policy contributed to the tightening up of the hierarchical composition of political domination. The form of the state that developed through the class conflict of the late 1970s and early 1980s was no longer characterised by institutional forms of class collaboration. The reassertion of the Right to political domination constituted the state as an agenda setting force that defined, through legal means, the role trade unions were allowed to play.*

A special unit of the state was set up to deal with the "threat" posed by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament while Special Branch and MI5 began a systematic intimidation of CND supporters and other "subversives." Richard Norton-Taylor reported in the *Guardian* (1992) that MI5 kept records on one million people while the former secret agent James Rusbridger (1989) reported on a secret service "out of control" compiling dossiers on a wide range of "suspects."

Also under the Conservatives, a series of laws gave the security services extra powers. In 1989 the Security Service Act (actually drafted by MI5 lawyers) placed the intelligence service on a statutory basis for the first time, providing it with legal powers to tap phones, bug and burgle houses and intercept mail. It also authorised a new Security Service Tribunal to review warrants and investigate complaints from the public. MI5's mission was defined as the safeguarding of national security against threats "in particular its protection against threats from espionage, terrorism and sabotage, from the activities of agents and foreign powers and from actions intended to overthrow or undermine parliamentary democracy by political, industrial or violent means." It further added the role of safeguarding "the economic well-being of the United Kingdom against threats posed by the actions or intentions of persons outside the British Isles."

The Prevention of Terrorism Act was mostly used for intelligence gathering rather than securing prosecutions: with only a very small percentage of those held charged with terrorist offences. In addition, the Act has been used by the state to intimidate journalists into revealing confidential sources. Thus, in 1988 the BBC was forced to hand over footage of the mobbing of two soldiers who ran into a

funeral procession in Belfast. Following a *Despatches* programme, *The Committee*, by the independent company, Box Productions, in 1991, alleging collusion between loyalist death squads and members of the security forces in Northern Ireland, Channel 4 was committed for contempt for refusing to reveal its source and fined £75,000. Subsequently a researcher on the programme, Ben Hamilton, was charged with perjury by the Royal Ulster Constabulary. Though the charge was suddenly dropped in November 1992, the police retained all items seized from Mr Hamilton. They included his personal computer, all disks, newspaper cuttings and notes of telephone calls and meetings with other journalists interested in the programme. Another journalist involved in the programme received death threats and was forced to leave his home and live incognito at a secret address.

The Intelligence Services Act of 1993 created the Intelligence and Security Committee which meets in secret to overview services' activities, reporting to the PM and not parliament. As Mark Hollingsworth comments (2000):

*The intelligence and security committee is answerable to the prime minister and not to parliament. It is not a select committee and so has limited powers of investigation. It refuses to accept evidence from witnesses critical of M15 and M16 and any new information is at the discretion of the agency chiefs. The committee has become absorbed as a creature of the executive rather than parliament.*

Apart from France, virtually every other western country has independent oversight of intelligence agencies. Then in 1996 the Security Service Act M15's functions were extended to "act in support of the prevention and detection of crime."

Under Blair the secret state has prospered even further with the costs of the security services soaring secretly to double the official figure of £140 million. Stephen Dorril (2000, 798) reports how even ministers are unaware of this: "It is unlikely that ministers are aware of the network of 'front' companies that M16 set up in the early nineties, nor of the numerous bank accounts, such as the one at the Drummonds branch of the Royal Bank of Scotland, which the Service operates." The Labour government also dealt increasingly aggressively towards mainstream journalists who dared to investigate the secret state. In 1999, Tony Geraghty became the first journalist charged under the new Official Secrets Act. His alleged crime was to have revealed in a book the extent of the army's surveillance operations and M15 dirty tricks in Northern Ireland. And he revealed how army computer systems "provide total cover of a largely innocent population." Charges were eventually dropped but one of his alleged contacts, Col Nigel Wylde, faced the prospects of a criminal trial.

Journalists on the *Guardian* and *Observer* who developed contacts with the dissident M15 officer, David Shayler after he revealed secret service involvement in an assassination plot against President Gaddafi, of Libya, were also threatened with jail sentences. And the *Sunday Times* Northern Ireland editor, Liam Clarke, was summoned by the police special squad after his paper was prevented by an injunction from publishing allegations of further dirty tricks by the army's force research unit — a clandestine cell set up to handle informants in the IRA and loyalist paramilitary groups.

Government plans in 2000 for a new terrorism bill also provoked serious concerns amongst civil rights campaigners and journalists. The bill, introduced into

the Commons on 2 December 1999, radically extended the definition of terrorism to mean “the use of serious violence against persons or property or the threat to use such violence, to intimidate or coerce a government, the public or any section of the public for political, religious or ideological ends.” Journalists covering direct action could be caught by Clause 18, carrying a five-year sentence for failure to report information received professionally which could lead to a terrorist act.

In March 2000, concerns emerged that the Regulatory Investigatory Powers Bill would provide a “Big Brother’s Charter” allowing the police and security services wide-ranging powers to intercept email and other electronic communications — and could lead to people facing criminal charges if they could not decode files on their computers, even if they did not create them.

Also in the US under Reagan, Bush and Clinton, the power of the president’s executive office based around the National Security Council and the CIA (together with many other covert organisations as a state within the state) grew enormously. As Hellinger and Judd argue (1991, 190): “There now exists a recognisable pattern of hidden powers, a covert presidency, that rests on centralising presidential direction of personnel, budgets and information; on the manipulation of the media and on the expanding use of national security to control the political agenda.”

## Secret State: Secret Warfare

Since 1945 the US and UK have deployed troops every year somewhere in the globe, mostly away from the gaze of the prying media (Peak 1982). The dominant view reproduced in the mainstream media represents the state as having fought defensively only in exceptional cases since 1945. The Gulf war of 1991 was represented as the consequence of a legitimate defensive response to an unprovoked attack by Saddam Hussein on innocent Kuwait; the Yugoslav war of 1999 was a “humanitarian” intervention in defence of the Kosovo Albanians facing the terror of Serbia’s Slobodan Milošević. But such interpretations grossly oversimplify the historical record and obscure the offensive ambitions of US/UK imperialist and military strategies.

During the 1980s and 1990s (even despite the collapse of the Soviet Union) military spending continued to expand relentlessly, reinforcing the permanent war economies in the US and UK. By 1990, more than 30,000 US companies were engaged in military production while roughly 3,275,000 jobs were in the defence industries and 70 per cent of all money directed at research and development went on defence work (Drucker 1993, 126). In 1999, as the militarisation of the economy continued unabated, Congress approved an increase in military spending of £20 billion making the total Pentagon budget a massive \$288.8 billion. This compared with a total of \$245 billion for all the other domestic discretionary spending — including education, job training, housing, environment and health. President Clinton went on to sign a bill appropriating \$15 billion above the Pentagon budget to conduct the war against Yugoslavia. Most of that increase was to be taken from the social security surplus fund (Talbot 1999).

In the UK, the military industrial complex had grown so enormous by the 1990s that the defence industry accounted for 11 per cent of industrial production, defence exports were worth up to £33 billion a year (the country being the third largest arms exporter after the US and Russia) and defence related jobs amounted to 600,000.

With the advent of the Reagan and Thatcher administrations, the western elites were determined to roll back the revolutionary successes of the previous decade (Halliday 1986, 92). Bob Woodward's history of the CIA's covert wars of the 1980s details a complex web of clandestine activity (Woodward 1987). Moreover, in a series of military adventures against puny Third World countries the US and UK developed over the decade military strategies which meant that overt warfare could be conducted in as much secrecy as covert conflict. And the media played the crucial role in maintaining this secrecy.

The military adventures of the UK in the Falklands (1982), the US in Grenada (1983), Libya (1986), and Panama (1989) all bore the hallmarks of the new military/media strategies.

- They were all quickie attacks. The Libya bombings lasted just 11 minutes. All the others were over within days.
- They were all largely risk-free and fought from the air. All resulted in appalling civilian casualties. Yet the propaganda — in Orwellian style — claimed the raids were for essentially peaceful purposes. Casualty figures were covered up and the military hardware was constantly represented as “precise,” “surgical” and “modern” and “clean.”
- Media and military strategies were closely integrated. With journalists denied access to planes, the massacres were hidden behind the military's media manipulation and misinformation.
- The massive displays of UK/US force bore little relation to the threats posed.
- Following the end of the Cold War and the demise of the “great enemy,” the Soviet Union, the military/industrial complex needed the manufacture of “big” enemies to legitimise the continued massive expenditure on the weapons of war. Thus, the threats posed to US/Western interests, in all these military adventures, were either grossly exaggerated or non-existent.
- Central to the new strategies was the demonisation of the leaders of the “enemy” states. In the case of Grenada, they were “communists,” Colonel Gaddafi, of Libya, was demonised in the US and UK mainstream media throughout the early 1980s as a “terrorist warlord” and his supposed links with the Soviet Union were constantly stressed (Chomsky 1986). Immediately before the raids Reagan dubbed him a “mad dog.” Over the Panama invasion, the propaganda constantly focused on the demonised personality of “drug-trafficker” Noriega (Dickson 1994, 813).
- All the invasions were celebrated in ecstatic language throughout the mainstream media. The editorial consensus remained firmly behind the military attacks. Administration lies were rarely challenged just as the global protests against the actions were largely ignored.

### Hacks and Spooks

Though the dominant ideology reproduced in the mainstream media stresses the myth of democratic involvement, plurality and openness, the principal characteristic of the modern state, as defined by John Keane (1991, 101-103), is armed secrecy. The mainstream media are tied closely to this secret state through shared economic and political interests — and through personal contacts. Obviously it is difficult to identify the extent of these links in any precise detail. But the evidence available is striking.

Take, for instance, the spy novelist John le Carré who worked for MI6 between 1960 and 1964. He has stated that the British secret service then controlled large parts of the press — just as they may do today (Dorril 1993, 281). David Leigh (1989, 113), in his seminal study of the way in which the secret service smeared and destabilised the government of Harold Wilson before his sudden resignation in 1976, quotes an MI5 officer: “We have somebody in every office in Fleet Street.” Investigative reporter Phillip Knightley, author of a seminal study of the secret services, argues that today not only do they have representatives in all the major publishing houses but also at their printing works.

In 1975, following Senate hearings on the CIA which highlighted the extent of agency recruitment of both American and British journalists, sources revealed that half the foreign staff of a British daily were on the MI6 payroll. Jonathan Bloch and Patrick Fitzgerald (1983, 134-141), in their study of British intelligence and covert action, report the “editor of one of Britain’s most distinguished journals” as believing that more than half its foreign correspondents were on the MI6 payroll. And Roy Greenslade, former editor of the *Mirror*, has commented: “Most tabloid newspapers — or even newspapers in general — are playthings of MI5. You are recipients of the sting” (Milne 1994, 262). Also in 1991 Richard Norton-Taylor revealed in the *Guardian* that 500 prominent Britons had been paid by the CIA and now defunct Bank of Commerce and Credit International including 90 journalists (Pilger 1998, 496).

According to Stephen Dorril, author of a major study of the secret services in the 1990s, many managers and top executives of national newspapers had close links with the intelligence services during the 1939-45 war and they continued recruiting during the immediate post-war decades. For instance, he argues that even George Orwell, author of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, through his friendship with David Astor, editor of the *Observer*, developed links with intelligence. As these top executives died, so the links between the intelligence services and journalists weakened. But Dorril suggests that intelligence gathering during the miners’ strike of 1984-85 was helped by the fact that during the 1970s MI5’s F Branch had made a special effort to recruit industrial correspondents — with great success. In the mid 1980s he was given a list by a senior *Observer* journalist of five foreign affairs journalists on a Sunday newspaper who had acted as correspondents for the intelligence services (1993, 281). He claims that the secret services recruited a number of journalists during the Balkans crisis of the 1990s who were able to provide important intelligence. Similarly, David Leigh (2000) records a series of instances in which the secret services manipulated prominent journalists. He says reporters are routinely approached by intelligence agents. “I think the cause of honest journalism is best served by candour. We all ought to come clean about these approaches and devise some ethics to deal with them. In our vanity, we imagine that we control these sources. But the truth is that they are very deliberately seeking to control us.”

### The Secret Gulf Wars of the 1990s

Despite the appearance of 24-hour saturation coverage of the Gulf war of 1991, it was, in fact, a conflict entirely shrouded in secrecy. Journalists were the real prisoners of war, trapped behind the barbed wire of reporting curbs, according to William Boot (1991, 24) Very few journalists were allowed to travel with the troops; very little actual combat was observed since reporters were denied access to planes; most were confined to hotels in Saudi Arabia.

Secret service disinformation played a crucial role hiding the reality of the war from the public. For instance, when in January and February 1991 Iraqi soldiers were deserting in droves and succumbing to one slaughter after another, mainstream US and UK newspapers predicted the largest ground battle since the Second World War. Images of enormous Iraqi defensive structures with massive berms and highly sophisticated systems of underground trenches filled the media. In the end there was nothing more than a walkover, a rout. A barbaric slaughter buried beneath the fiction of heroic warfare.

Much of the propaganda focused on demonising Saddam Hussein. It helped place all blame for the conflict on the one man while at the same marginalising the roles played by US/UK imperialism and militarism in provoking hostilities. Much of the information for constant demonising profiles of Saddam came from a psychological “study” provided by Mossad, the Israeli secret service (Keeble 1997, 69).

At the beginning of the conflict, the CIA announced that “Saddam” was at least two years away from producing a nuclear bomb but when it became necessary to bolster support for the war, the official line changed to stress that Iraq had the capacity to build a crude nuclear device within six months. The *Sunday Times* went further and cited a figure of “two months” from an American Defence Intelligence report. Intelligence reports later conceded that the DIA report had been designed to frighten the politicians into action.

During the 1990s, Iraq became the focus of regular manufactured crises (Carapico 1998). In January and June 1993, September 1996 and December 1998 US jets attacked sites in Iraq during rapid, risk-free actions and only an 11th hour intervention by UN secretary general Kofi Annan prevented strikes after a media-hyped crisis exploded in January-February 1998. Throughout 1999 and into the current year, regular attacks on Iraq by US and UK jets had become institutionalised gaining hardly any mention in the media. This is secret warfare par excellence!

## The Secret War against Yugoslavia 1999

The US/UK-led attacks on Yugoslavia in 1999 “turned out to be the most secret campaign in living memory,” according to historian Alistair Horne (Knightley 2000, 501). They were risk-free and conducted entirely from the air (as were Nato’s earlier strikes against Bosnian Serbs in 1995). Celebrated as “humanitarian” and “precise,” the attacks were, in fact, part of a desperate attempt by a newly-enlarged Nato to celebrate its 50 years’ anniversary with a symbolic victory in a manufactured “war” (Keeble 1999, 16; Johnstone 2000, 8-9).

The Kosovo theatre of war was largely a no-go area for the international media. The state systems of Yugoslavia and US/UK both found it in their interests to deny media access to the front line. During the Gulf war, journalists did accompany the troops in the ground assault on Kuwait but this was exceptional. It was mainly for symbolic purposes — to create the illusion of the “big, necessary war” against the “global threat” — and so legitimise the enormous expenditure on the military build-up. In the end, there was no opposition from Iraqi forces; the US-led forces entered Kuwait unopposed.

### The Silencing Function of the Media Consensus

**Creating the myth of warfare.** In keeping with the trend in military strategies since the 1980s, this was no war as commonly defined. There was no credible en-

emy. According to Phillip Knightley (2000, 514), following the 10-week bombardment Belgrade lost 600 soldiers and police and 2,600 civilians. Nato bombers hit 33 hospitals and 340 schools. Moreover thousands suffered traumas following the relentless bombing of the country, thousands lost their jobs and were thrown into poverty; the bombing of petro-chemical factories sparked an environmental catastrophe in the region; water supplies were threatened for millions, the bombing of bridges over the Danube seriously crippled trade in the region. Yugoslavia was transformed into the poorest country of Europe. Nato countries, in contrast, lost no soldiers in action. This was slaughter from the air. As Nato shifted its strategy to take in the deliberate targeting of civilians, in flagrant breach of international law, innocent people became mere “targets” of the high-flying jets.

**Technospeak and the invention of “clean warfare.”** Central to the representation of warfare since the 1980s has been the stress on “clean,” “surgical,” “precise” technology — and the hiding of the horror. Accordingly war in 1999 could be represented as “humanitarian.” In the dominant technospeak, western technology is always represented as good, progressive, faultless, civilised, rational. In contrast the enemy’s warfare is depicted as barbaric and anarchic. When western technology does not function normally, and civilians are killed, then it is due to “inevitable mistakes.” Such a phrase carries no moral condemnation; its propaganda function is to desensitise us all to the horrors of warfare. Significantly, outrage was only once expressed in Fleet Street during the Gulf and Kosovo wars. And this was in a Daily Express headline criticising the BBC’s coverage of the February 1991 bombing of al Ameriyya shelter in Baghdad, which killed hundreds of women and children. The BBC’s reporter on the spot failed to find any evidence of military presence at the shelter — and thus faced the wrath of the Express.

**Putting all the blame on Milošević.** Just as the deployment of ground troops during the Gulf massacres of 1991 was needed for the manufacture of the “Big War” so the demonisation of the Serbs and, in particular, President Milošević as the “evil, new Hitler” helped legitimise the excessive use of force against defenceless “targets.” When in mid-April, Nato bombed a convoy of refugees, blame throughout the press for the atrocity was redirected at Milošević. So the Sun of 15 April carried the front-page headline: “Our bombs, his fault.” “Whatever happened,” commented the Daily Telegraph, “it is Slobodan Milošević who is entirely responsible for creating the circumstances that led to their death.” Or as Jamie Shea, Nato’s spokesman, put it: “The evil here is not our mistake. The evil here is Milošević” (Knightley 2000, 513). Often the perpetrators of the atrocities were subtly transformed into becoming “victims” of a “propaganda coup by Milošević.”

One of the western media’s biggest propaganda coups came over the coverage of the Rambouillet meeting just before Nato began its bombing of Belgrade. The breakdown of the talks was universally represented as being the fault of Milošević. Yet, as US secretary of state Madeleine Albright, admitted on Allan Little’s BBC2 documentary “Moral Combat: Nato at War” on 12 March 2000 (which marked the first anniversary of the start of the bombings) the talks were manipulated to make it impossible for the Serbs to agree. Any close examination of the final Rambouillet documentation would have discovered this strategy.

In the first instance, the “accords” provided for Nato’s military occupation of the whole of Yugoslavia, not just Kosovo. According to Chapter 7, Article X, Nato



gained the right to shoot down any military aircraft over Kosovo and 25 km from the border with Serbia. The accord would also have given Nato unprecedented levels of access in and out of the entire country, while Nato forces would have been able to act above and beyond the law. Nato personnel were to be exempt from sales taxes, customs inspections and regulations and to have the right to import and export whatever they deemed necessary. Nato was to take control of the telecommunications services and it added: "The economy of Kosovo shall function in accordance with free market principles." In fact, it was a deal the Serbs could hardly be expected to accept: as the western powers realised only too well.

No newspaper carried the Rambouillet document in full — unlike earlier the broadsheets had carried almost verbatim accounts of the Starr report into Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky. Over this crucial document and the diplomatic manoeuvring surrounding it, there was silence. One journalist to highlight critically western strategies over Rambouillet was John Pilger in his *Guardian* column — and he was then accused of being a "traitor" by the government in parliament and denounced by journalist colleagues.

**Eliminating the role of US/UK imperialism in provoking the conflict.** The United States had been determined since the mid-1980s to push Yugoslavia towards capitalism. As early as March 1984, a secret National Security Decision Directive (No 133), declassified in 1990, identified the US policy towards Yugoslavia as encouraging its transformation towards capitalism. As Gervasi (1992, 42) comments: "The mechanisms included most-favoured nation status, credit policy, IMF stewardship, debt rescheduling, cultural and educational exchanges, information programmes, high-level visits and restrictions on diplomatic and consular personnel."

The abundant natural resources in Kosovo, with the richest mineral resources in all of Europe west of Russia (including gold, silver, pure lead, zinc, coal and oil) enhance its importance to western capitalism. Last year, for instance, Greece (a reluctant Nato partner in the aggression against Yugoslavia) agreed a multi-billion dollar deal with Serbia to develop a joint mining project, which could generate more than a trillion dollars in export revenue.

Yet from 1990 onwards, as the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary raced to embrace Nato, Yugoslavia stood out against the alliance's expansionist moves. It had to pay the price. Indeed, the 1999 Nato assault on Serbia might best be viewed as a continuation of western attempts to take over the country rather than a "humanitarian" intervention on behalf of the Albanian Kosovars. Intriguingly Walsey (2000) quotes a senior Foreign Office official claiming that any journalist who argued that the Kosovo war was a manifestation of western imperialism should be sacked. "Such theories belong in the history books. They might explain wars in the 19th century but not in the present day."

**Marginalising opposition to the war.** Significantly the Fleet Street consensus held firm over the war with virtually all the mainstream media in the US and UK supporting the action. In Britain only the *Independent on Sunday* dared to stand outside this consensus. And within a few weeks of the ending of the air strikes, its editor was sacked. Yet there were important shifts in the consensus. During the Gulf conflict of 1991 not only did all the editors, safe in their Fleet Street bunkers, loyally bang the drums of war; virtually all the commentators backed it with jingoistic fervour. In many respects in 1991, the editors were reproducing in knee-jerk

fashion the consensual frameworks of the Cold War but applying them, just months after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, to the new conditions of the Middle East conflict. By 1999, the Cold War consensus could not be sustained and divisions emerged amongst the elite over the manufactured crisis in the Balkans. And out of 63 prominent Fleet Street commentators, two-thirds backed the war (either giving full support to the air campaign or calling for troops to be sent in) while one third opposed it.

As in 1991, editorial commitment to the war meant that opposition to Nato's assault, both within Britain and globally, was marginalised. In Greece, for example, polls suggested that more than 90 per cent of the population were opposed to the attacks — even though it was a Nato country. As John Pilger wrote in the *Guardian*: "Thousands in Greece and Germany, protests taking place every night in colleges and town halls across Britain. Almost none of it is reported."

Newspapers were too busy reproducing the politicians' rhetoric about the war being waged by a united, "civilised" west against the "evil Milošević." Andy Walsey (2000) argues that there was deliberate censorship by the media over reports of opposition to the war. He cites the example of journalist Ian Craig who in May 1999 approached the media with a report about Greek hoteliers planning to sue Nato for loss of earnings. But he could find no outlet for his story. Newspapers claimed it was without substance because the number of western tourists visiting Greece had in fact increased. Walsey comments: "This was true but only is so far as the figure had increased on the previous month's paltry statistics — overall tourist visits to Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean were at an all-time low because of the region's proximity to the Balkans war."

**Making the Albanian Kosovars "worthy victims."** Nato's intervention in the Yugoslav civil war was based on the notion that the sufferings of the Albanian Kosovars in the face of Serbian oppression were exceptionally harsh — and thus required exceptional remedies. The British government, for instance, claimed on 17 June 1999 that Serbs had killed 10,000 ethnic Albanians in Kosovo in over 100 massacres. Western media coverage tended to reproduce such claims uncritically, focusing on the appalling ordeals of the refugees and rape victims, stressing the legitimacy of Nato's military intervention and downplaying the obvious fact that the refugees were fleeing Nato's bombs as much as the Serbian forces. Suddenly, the Albanian Kosovars, ignored for so long by the western media, were transformed into victims worthy of our compassion and support.

Yet the focus on the Albanian Kosovars was essentially for propaganda purposes. As Noam Chomsky (1999, 48-54) has stressed, in Colombia currently the refugee total is estimated by Church and other human rights groups at well over a million; In Turkey the number of internal Kurdish refugees is more than 2 million. Yet since Turkey and Colombia are backed by the leading Nato powers, both these human disasters are ignored by the media. They are victims not worthy of our compassion.

The expulsion from Kosovo of the Serbs by the Albanians after the Nato bombings ended received nothing like the same saturation coverage. Moreover, evidence throwing into serious doubt the much-hyped claims of systematic massacring by Serbian forces has been downplayed. By early November 1999, some 2,108 bodies had been exhumed by forensic teams in Kosovo. At the same time, UN and US State Department officials stressed that some of the dead in graves were soldiers of the Kosovo Liberation Army, or may have died ordinary deaths.

## Conclusion

Since the Kosovo war was Nato's first, there is a danger of seeing it as an isolated, unique event. In fact, it is best understood as being the culmination of a process in which wars have been fought in ever-increasing secrecy. This is not a massive elite conspiracy but the result of complex military, economic, political and social factors. Moreover, as this study of the Kosovo conflict has attempted to show, the ideological consensus within the mainstream media serves, above all, to hide the reality of horror of the new "humanitarian" warfare.

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