

Legitimizing 'Humanitarian Intervention'?

CNN, NATO and the Kosovo Crisis

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ABSTRACT

■ This article examines the coverage of NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia in March–June 1999 by the global television news organization, the Cable News Network (CNN). The article argues that NATO's precedent-setting action — the first conflict in which the world's most powerful military alliance intervened in the internal affairs of a sovereign state — was reported uncritically and presented by CNN as a humanitarian intervention. Television pictures tended to follow the news agenda set up by the US military. Few alternative views were aired and, most importantly, a fundamental change in the nature of NATO — from a defence alliance to an offensive peace-enforcing organization — was largely ignored. The article then goes on to analyse the international implications of such coverage, arguing that given the global reach and influence of a channel like CNN, this type of framing also shaped the wider view of the crisis in Kosovo. ■

Key Words CNN, Kosovo, NATO, news management, sovereignty

This article examines the coverage of NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia in March–June 1999 — the first conflict in which the US-led western military alliance intervened in the internal affairs of a sovereign state — by Cable News Network (CNN), 'the world's news leader'. It argues that in analysing the media treatment of the last military campaign of the 20th century, it is helpful to deploy an international relations perspective,

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to understand the strategic implications of NATO's precedent-setting action and the agenda of US diplomacy during the crisis.

The article suggests that NATO's bombing was presented by CNN as a humanitarian intervention, where a 'benevolent' West, led by the USA, was seen as liberating citizens from a dictatorship. This is set in the context of post-Cold War news management by the US military, drawing parallels with the 1991 'clean' airwar against Iraq and subsequent US military interventions. CNN's coverage, it argues, followed the news agenda set by NATO and the US military.

Few alternative views were aired and, most importantly, a fundamental change in the nature of NATO, a relic of the Cold War, from a defence alliance to an offensive peace-enforcing organization, was largely ignored. The article then goes on to analyse the international implications of such coverage, arguing that given the global reach and influence of news organizations such as CNN, this type of framing also shaped the wider view of the crisis in Kosovo.

Operation Allied Force

Operation Allied Force, NATO's 78-day bombing of Yugoslavia between 24 March and 10 June 1999, was arguably one of the most significant developments of the post-Cold War era, one that will shape strategic thinking in the new century in the West with obvious global repercussions. In the 11-week bombardment, 12,000 bombing missions took place, in which more than 900 aircraft were involved. More than 400 Tomahawk cruise missiles were launched and 20,000 'smart' and 5000 conventional bombs were dropped. NATO 'won' the Kosovo conflict without a single life lost in combat operations on its own side. It was also the first time in the history of warfare that victory was achieved by air power alone (Cook, 1999).

Unlike the 1991 Gulf War, where clear geostrategic and economic interests were involved, television networks such as CNN found it more difficult to characterize the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. The general impression that most of the media projected of the decade-old crisis was that it was an intractable problem of the Balkans (Europe's 'Third World'), with its history and 'traditions' of ethnic hatred:

The Western involvement in the region is obscured by a poisonous Western imperial propaganda which turns reality on its head. It says that the Balkans cause the West no end of trouble because of the appalling characters who live there. The reality is that the Western powers have

caused the Balkan peoples no end of suffering because they continue to use the region as a theatre for their power politics. (Gowan, 1999: 105)

A new role for NATO

Just weeks before its 50th birthday, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was involved in the first offensive action in its history, intervening in the internal affairs of a sovereign country that was not threatening any of its member states and was outside its area of deployment. By doing so NATO was violating the charter under which it was established in 1949 as a defensive organization — protecting western democracies from the Soviet threat. In addition, the UN Security Council had not approved the action. Though international law has provisions for humanitarian intervention, it can only be authorized by the Security Council, by consensus, if it is satisfied that the situation poses a threat to international peace. International law does not permit military intervention by a group of countries in the internal affairs of another.

With the end of the Cold War, NATO was in danger of becoming an anachronism and the US, which accounts for 60 percent of its budget, was searching for a new role for the organization. Questions had been raised about the relevance of a military alliance at a time when its counterpart Warsaw Pact had been dissolved, with three of its members (Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary) joining NATO. In the civil wars in Yugoslavia, NATO found a new field of action: its planes were used in Bosnia in 1995 as part of a UN operation. A NATO-led force — SFOR (Stabilization Force) — continued to monitor the 'peace' there, though its motives may additionally have been to check the emerging 'German sphere of influence' in Central and Eastern Europe. The NATO action was also influenced by the US desire to undermine moves by Germany and France to develop a common European defence and security policy (Gowan, 1999: 93).

Thus a 'peacekeeping' and 'peace-enforcing' role was devised for NATO, and a Rapid Reaction Force created to deal with 'humanitarian emergencies'. This flexible and highly mobile force was to police the world's hotspots. In 1997, NATO's Rapid Reaction Force was already undertaking military exercises in Central Asia in what was their first ever out-of-area deployment, in a region outside the remit of NATO but of crucial importance for the world's energy industries, given the oil resources in the Caspian Basin (Meek and Whitehouse, 1997). By 1998, US secretary of state Madeleine Albright was describing NATO as 'a force for peace from the Middle East to Central Africa', while US senator

Richard Lugar was insisting that if NATO 'does not go out of area, it will go out of business' (quoted in Buchan and Fidler, 1999).

The intervention in Kosovo was the next logical step for a military organization which was in the process of changing its character. Little concern was expressed by networks such as CNN about the legality of the bombing, or even its implications for the concept of national sovereignty, which has defined political relations between nations since the end of the Second World War. Crucially, it created a new precedent in international relations, that defending human rights can override national sovereignty. The concept of 'humanitarian intervention' was born.

NATO intervention and the media

The key argument presented by NATO and consistently reproduced by CNN and other mainstream western media outlets, was that the Yugoslav government had caused a humanitarian emergency in Kosovo, which was interpreted as a threat to international peace (Solana, 1999). The US and its allies insisted that compelling humanitarian considerations prompted them to act, despite no prior authorization from the UN Security Council. The Yugoslav authorities were accused of indulging in a genocide campaign against the ethnic Albanian population of the province. Anthony Lake, a former US national security adviser, argued that the bombing of Yugoslavia offered an example of the 'saintly glow' of US policy, since Washington acted merely for humanitarian reasons (quoted in Chomsky, 1999: 14).

The ostensible reason for NATO action was the failure of the peace talks at Rambouillet in February and March 1999. The Serbian government was willing to sign until a secret appendix was handed to them on the last day, demanding, in effect, they surrender all of Yugoslavia to NATO occupation. Appendix B of the agreement said that NATO should enjoy 'free and unrestricted passage and unimpeded access throughout the FRY (Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) including associated airspace and territorial waters', something which no sovereign state was likely to accept (quoted in Chomsky, 1999: 107). The Serbian National Assembly resolution passed on 23 March (the day before the NATO bombing started) included a proposal for 'political autonomy' that could have been the basis for a peaceful resolution of the crisis, but this was summarily rejected by the US. That the Rambouillet process was based on the US view of the crisis, and the agreement was essentially a US document, with little input from international organizations such as the UN or European Union, was rarely mentioned in CNN reports, while the

Serbian opposition to the document was presented as intransigent and unreasonable.

NATO and other western officials dominated coverage through the sheer volume of information, although much of it was later proved inaccurate and of little direct relevance. The importance of the role of the media was acknowledged by the award of 'European Communicator of the Year' to Jamie Shea, the NATO spokesperson, by the London-based *PR Week* magazine, which lauded his role in making a moral case for NATO bombing. It said that: 'History will remember that Shea won the communications battle in a war fought largely through the media' (*PR Week*, 1999: 13). Shea and others were supplying speculative if not false information to a select group of influential journalists, who appeared to be not averse to reporting uncritically (Fisk, 1999; BBC, 1999b; Goff, 1999). Some key examples mentioned during the first two weeks of the bombing, and which were later found to have had no basis, were that four well-known Kosovo Albanian politicians had been murdered by the Serbian paratroopers and that Pristina football stadium had been turned into a concentration camp. Other reports whose veracity was later doubted included claims that NATO bombers had destroyed hundreds of Serb tanks and personnel carriers.

CNN's coverage

With its 24-hour international news service that specializes in 'breaking news', CNN becomes a particularly significant news outlet at the time of an international crisis. Reaching more than 150 million television households in over 212 countries and territories worldwide, CNN is the world's most influential television news organization. The CNN Group, the largest and most profitable news and information corporation in the world, is available to more than 800 million people across the globe. The group includes six cable and satellite television networks (CNN, CNN Headline News, CNN International, CNNfn, CNN/SI and CNN en Español), two radio networks (CNNRadio and a Spanish version CNNRadio Noticias), 11 websites on CNN Interactive and CNN Newsource, the world's most extensive syndicated news service, with more than 200 international affiliates.

At the height of the bombing, CNN had 70 journalists and other crew in the region and it was spending an estimated \$150,000 a day during the campaign (Gibson, 1999).

Though it claims to be an international service with regional centres and feeds all over the world, CNN's coverage appeared to present a very

American view of the crisis. One of its key news programmes is *Worldview*, broadcast at 11 pm (BST), and 'seen live around the world'. In addition, CNN's *Insight*, a regular 30-minute programme, offers analysis of topical subjects, including interviews with experts and commentators. Both before and during the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, an examination of these two programmes shows that CNN's general coverage of the war in Kosovo was characterized by:¹

1. Uncritical reporting of NATO's action as a humanitarian intervention, with an omission of analysis of the change in NATO's role, legality of NATO bombing and its impact on national sovereignty.
2. Demonizing Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic and promoting the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) as 'freedom fighters'.
3. Focusing on alleged Serb atrocity stories and exaggerating the numbers of Kosovo Albanians killed.
4. Promotion of the technological aspects of the war and playing down of NATO-inflicted casualties and damage.

Legitimizing NATO's action

The war was presented as a humanitarian emergency, a last resort when all other diplomatic options had been exhausted. By giving a large proportion of news time to US military commanders, NATO spokespersons and generally hawkish 'independent' experts, CNN tended to legitimize the bombing. Though Yugoslav and Serbian leaders were given an opportunity to put across their point, the time allotted to such views was very limited. This was also the case in CNN's analysis and comment programme *Insight* and the special extended *Worldview* reports. The majority of the experts interviewed — both military and civilian — supported the NATO action, arguing that the alliance was the best guarantee for peace in Europe. On one *Insight* programme, broadcast two weeks before the bombing began, George Joulwan, the former NATO supreme allied commander talked of 'new challenges' for NATO in the region (*Insight*, 12 March 1999). However, in the programmes examined, NATO's violation of international law and state sovereignty was not directly mentioned.

Demonizing Milosevic and bailing KLA as freedom fighters

CNN, as other mainstream western media organizations, presented the bombing as a moral crusade against a tyrant. The demonization of the

Serbs and the personalization of the conflict with Slobodan Milosevic was a continuation of eight years of western reporting of Serbs as the main perpetrator of what has been routinely called 'ethnic cleansing' (Judah, 1997). Projected as a brutal dictator and an irrational leader, Milosevic was compared with the Iraqi president, Saddam Hussein, ruling autocratically over a 'rogue' state whose dislodging through massive violence was justified (*Insight*, 25 March 1999). Interviews with experts and US and British government officials openly talking about the ways and means to overthrow the Serbian president, were included in reports on CNN.

The KLA, which in 1998 was labelled as a terrorist organization by the US government and by a leading US-based human rights group, running its operations with profits from international drug smuggling, was transformed by CNN into an army of 'freedom fighters' (Vistica, 1999). This was in a long US tradition of making freedom fighters out of drug dealers: for example, Contra rebels in Nicaragua and Mujahedin in Afghanistan. Though it was well known that the KLA was funded, trained and armed by western intelligence agencies, CNN reports about the KLA's military capabilities, showing obviously new equipment and uniforms, constantly maintained that these had been funded through money from diasporic communities of 700,000 Kosovan Albanians, many of whom live in the US.

By July 1999, the *New York Times* was reporting that the KLA provisional government, headed by Hashim Thaci, who had appointed himself the prime minister and his uncle the defence minister, seemed to 'care little for the civilities of Western style democracy' (Hedges, 1999: 6). The promised disarming of KLA guerrillas has not taken place: instead the KLA has been funded, armed and legitimized by NATO as Kosovo's new army. It was renamed as Kosovo Protection Corps, to the understandable fear of 50,000 remaining Serbs in Kosovo (Usher, 1999: 36).

The atrocity story

The focus of CNN news bulletins leading up to the bombing was on Serbian atrocities — real or alleged. Photographs taken by US spy satellites of suspected mass graves were regularly shown on CNN. Television viewers worldwide were shown pictures of the misery of refugees, fleeing their homes, though it was later revealed that some of these were organized as PR stunts (Borger, 1999). More people had been displaced at the end than at the start of the bombing. After the NATO

forces entered Kosovo on 12 June 1999, it became clear, wrote a veteran correspondent of *The Guardian*, that 'it was KLA advice, rather than Serbian deportations which led some of the hundreds of thousands of Albanians to leave Kosovo' (Steele, 1999).

The number of people killed as a result of alleged Serbian atrocities was wildly exaggerated by the leaders of the US and Britain and NATO military commanders and repeated uncritically by CNN, as well as other networks. At one point, the claim was made that as many as 100,000 people had been executed and thrown into mass graves. After the NATO troops moved into Kosovo, suspected massacre sites were scoured for evidence and bodies exhumed under the supervision of prosecutors from the UN's International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). By November 1999, according to ICTY's chief prosecutor Carla del Ponte, 2100 bodies had been exhumed. However, though it was not clear how many of these had been killed in fighting between the Yugoslav army and the KLA, it was clear that the US had wilfully exaggerated the extent of war crimes committed by Serbian forces in Kosovo. Also, since the KFor (Kosovo Implementation Force) entered Kosovo, nearly 400 people have been killed in ethnic violence, a figure similar to that before the NATO bombing (Bird, 1999).

High-tech weapons and costly 'mistakes'

Once the bombing started, CNN, like other western television companies, showed footage provided by NATO, displaying the latest military technology. In enthusiastic tones, CNN journalists extolled the efficiency and accuracy of the weaponry: for example, a CNN reporter on board the *USS Philippines* in the Adriatic Sea described the effectiveness of tomahawk missiles. As in the 1991 Gulf crisis, the 'virtual' war gave a showcase to the makers of the latest high-tech weaponry, helping to justify the \$280 billion defence budget of the US. Reconnaissance photographs and cockpit videos, provided by the army and intelligence communities, were routinely shown by CNN during the bombing, following the Pentagon's view of the war. Interviews with American pilots returning after successful bombing tours were also given a prominent place in the reporting.

However, CNN reports tended to ignore NATO's use of radioactive material in some of its weaponry. NATO has subsequently confirmed that anti-tank shells fired by US Thunderbolt aircraft each contained 275 grams of depleted uranium, a radioactive and chemically toxic material

that, upon impact, may turn into a 'mobile aerosol'. Many of the compounds released can cause miscarriages and birth defects.

More often than not, 'collateral damage' was presented as unfortunate exceptions, ignoring the regularity with which civilian targets — hospitals, television studios, housing estates, factories and power sources — were bombarded, sometimes with 'anti-personnel' cluster bombs. One major mistake, according to reports on CNN, was the 'accidental' bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade on 7 May 1999, blamed on old maps provided by the CIA. It was subsequently revealed in a joint investigation by the London *Observer* and the Danish newspaper *Politiken*, that the bombing was a deliberate act and not an error, as NATO's electronic intelligence had detected signals being sent from the embassy to the Yugoslav army (Sweeney et al., 1999).

CNN's coverage of the NATO bombing, in the tradition of war reporting since the Gulf crisis, focused on the military success of 'allied' efforts and provided moral justification for the action. The news discourse simplified the complex situation in Kosovo into an 'us vs them' format. More importantly, CNN did not really address the key issues raised by the NATO bombing, namely the precedent of military intervention, thereby changing the rules of international relations, undermining state sovereignty and the UN system.

The dependency syndrome

Such coverage can have a global impact, given the international reach of US/UK media, through such international newspapers and news magazines as *International Herald Tribune*, *Time*, *Newsweek* and *The Economist*; radio stations such as BBC World Service and Voice of America; and television networks like CNN. Transnational news agencies are very few and continue to be dominated by what has been called the US/UK 'news duopoly' (Tunstall and Machin, 1999). The three western news agencies Associated Press (AP), Reuters and Agence France-Press between them dominate the global flow of news, with AP alone putting out 20 million words per day, covering 112 countries with 237 worldwide bureaux and over 3421 journalists. Two of the world's biggest wire services — AP and Reuters — are also the two main providers of international television news material. Reuters Television (formerly Visnews), one of the world's two largest television news agencies, remains a key player in global trade in news footage, and its services are used by major news organizations such as CNN and BBC. Reuters also owns 20 percent of the London-based Independent Television News (ITN).

Its rival, Associated Press Television News (APTN) which was launched in 1998 following the acquisition of leading television news agency Worldwide Television News (WTN) by AP, is another major presence in global television news. APTN integrates the operations of APTV, the London-based video news agency launched by AP in 1994, and WTN. At the beginning of 2000, APTN had 330 subscribers in 110 countries, while Reuters Television supplied news footage to 310 broadcasters in 93 countries.

This development indicates further narrowing of international television news sources — just two organizations now supply most of the news footage to broadcasters worldwide. This overwhelming US/UK dominance in the supply of raw footage can result in imbalances in the way the world is covered by television news. Although they employ international staff and produce high quality news reports, the perspective is often western, or more accurately American. Consciously or unconsciously, they pursue an American news agenda, which may not reflect the concerns of the rest of the world. It has been argued that news agencies have contributed significantly to the globalization and commodification of international information (Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen, 1998).

The premier position of western news agencies is based on professional output — a reputation for speed and accuracy in their coverage of international events. At the heart of this credibility is the ability to consistently provide fast and authoritative news to an international audience. It has been argued that journalism itself is an Anglo-American invention (Chalaby, 1996), and this has been borne out by the example of the internationalization of the CNN model of round-the-clock television news.

CNN — ‘the world’s news leader’

CNN shot to international fame during the 1991 Gulf War, when its reporters in Baghdad beamed live the US bombing of the Iraqi capital, thus contributing significantly to making it the world’s first ‘real-time’ war, in which television became ‘the first and principal source of news for most people, as well as a major source of military and political intelligence for both sides’ (Hachten, 1999: 144).

Claiming to be ‘the world’s news leader’, CNN’s international presence was made possible by its use of satellite technology. CNN was one of the first international broadcasters to take advantage of the technology, to ‘blanket the globe’, using a mixture of Intelsat, Intersputnik, PanAmSat and regional satellite signals (Flournoy and Stewart,

1997). Another reason for its global news presence was its aggressive strategy of covering live international news events, through news exchange programmes with more than 100 broadcasting organizations across the world. The resultant *CNN World Report*, started in 1987, was a major reason for its initial acceptance among international broadcasters and its eventual growth (Volkmer, 1999).

This on-the-spot reporting of global events gave CNN unparalleled power to mould international public opinion and even contributed to influencing the actions of people involved in the events it was covering. Politicians such as Boris Yeltsin, astutely used the presence of CNN cameras during his very public opposition to the 1991 coup in the Soviet Union, which acted as a catalyst for the break-up of the Soviet Union. Such instances show that networks like CNN can contribute to a new version of television-inspired media diplomacy, presenting 'opportunities to constantly monitor news events and disseminate timely diplomatic information' (Hoge, 1994: 136). There is little doubt that CNN established the importance of a global round-the-clock television news network, a concept which 'certainly changed the international news system — especially during times of international crisis and conflict' (Hachten, 1999: 151).

Though there are now other dedicated round-the-clock global news services — BBC World, MSNBC and Sky News — and regional news and current affairs channels such as pan-Arabic al-Jazeera, Brazil's Globo News and Rupert Murdoch's India-based Star News, CNN still commands the highest viewership of any news organization. In the US, where CNN was being distributed to 77 million homes in 1999, the established three networks — ABC, NBC and CBS — have had to adapt their operations to the 24-hour channel, while Fox network, part of Murdoch's empire, has launched a 24-hour news channel (Schreiber, 1998). In 1998, CNN was Europe's most watched news channel, reaching 79 million households, broadcasting 24 hours a day to 37 countries, with 4.5 hours a day of programming from its London centre (Callard, 1998).

Nevertheless, CNN is watched by a relatively small proportion of viewers — they fall in the category of what CNN calls 'influentials' — government ministers, top bureaucrats, company chief executives, military chiefs, religious and academic elites (Flournoy and Stewart, 1997). Perhaps more importantly, it is constantly being monitored by journalists and news organizations worldwide for any breaking news stories. It is the only network capable of covering international news instantly, given its wide network of correspondents — in 1998 it had 32 international bureaux with 150 correspondents — and its communications resources

— in 2000 CNN was beaming its programmes through a network of 23 satellites to cover the entire globe.

However, it remains an advertisement-based channel whose output may sometimes lack depth in its desire to catch up with the speed and delivery of stories, and veers towards infotainment. As competition grows and more and more national all-news channels appear with the expansion of digital broadcasting, the pressure to be first with the news — television news is a US\$3 billion business — is likely to grow. Already, there is a discernible tendency among television news channels to sacrifice depth in favour of the widest and quickest reach of live news to an increasingly heterogeneous global audience. It has been argued that the 'CNNization' of television news has become a model for expanding 'American news values around the world' (Papathanassopoulos, 1999: 22). For many non-Americans, CNN is the voice of the US government and the corporate elite, despite its international presence, its multinational staff (though usually US-educated or domiciled) and its claims to be free from US geostrategic and economic interests.

Public diplomacy

In western democracies a symbiotic relationship exists between the media and governments, and public diplomacy — the use of the mass media to promote foreign policy goals — is a central aspect of this relationship. 'Information is power in the foreign policy sense . . . and one may grant the necessity for governments to manipulate it on occasion as they would other instruments of national power' (Cohen, 1963: 279). In the era of round-the-clock global news, the governments have refined their public diplomacy to market their policies successfully to international publics. This is true as much for the Bush administration's attempts to 'sell the war' during the 1990–1 Gulf crisis as for the subsequent 'humanitarian interventions' which have defined US foreign policy in the 1990s. The world's view of US military interventions was, to a large extent, moulded by the US-supplied images of Operation Just Cause in 1989 in Panama; Operation Provide Comfort (in northern Iraq, following the Gulf War in 1991); Operation Restore Hope in Somalia in 1992 and Operation Uphold Democracy in Haiti in 1994 (Seib, 1997). It has been argued that American journalists rarely criticize US military interventions and the mainstream US media have let the government set the terms of military policy debate in the news (Mermin, 1999).

In the market-driven media environment there appears to be a tendency to simplify complex international issues into easily digestible

'stories', given the proliferation of 24-hour television news culture. In such an environment, the coverage of the global South, where most instability exists and chances of peace enforcement for mobile units of NATO in their new role as globocops abound, is likely to be further distorted. Already, only certain parts of the South — where the West might have geopolitical and economic interests — and particular types of stories, which have wide appeal, are given prominence on international television channels. So, for example, the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka or civil war in Sierra Leone (linked to the interests of multinational diamond companies operating there) rarely get much coverage on CNN.

It is not just a question of the quantity, also important is the way in which issues impinging on western geopolitical interests are covered by mainstream western, and by extension, global television channels such as CNN. Despite protestations from western media organizations, such double standards in reporting are not uncommon and have been well documented: for example, in the context of Vietnam (Hallin, 1986), East Timor and Central America (Herman and Chomsky, 1988) and Iraq (Mowlana et al., 1992).

In the post-Cold War era, communism seems to have been replaced by 'Third World threats', especially emanating from Islamic 'fundamentalism'. The security issues for the West — narco-terrorism, the spread of weapons of mass destruction among 'rogue' nations and the alleged threat to western investment from nationalist forces — are all likely to be in the global South. In the absence of a credible alternative media system, the US position on an important international issue — given the reach and influence of a US network like CNN — often becomes the dominant perspective.

More humanitarian interventions?

In the new century the Kosovo precedent raises many important questions. It confers legitimacy for NATO intervention outside its area and without UN authorization, and gives credence to US strategic thinking on changing NATO's mission to address issues such as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, drugs and terrorism. But the key legacy of Operation Allied Force is the legitimization of so-called humanitarian intervention (Guicherd, 1999; Haass, 1999).

Within months of the bombing, humanitarian intervention was being debated within the UN. During the 1999 session of the UN General Assembly, secretary-general Kofi Annan was talking about the need for humanitarian intervention wherever civilian populations were at

risk, echoing what an Indian newspaper called 'the West's growing tendency to use the banner of humanitarianism as a cover for a new era of gunboat diplomacy' (*The Times of India*, 1999). Many western leaders also made an impassioned plea for the 'international community' (a euphemism for the West and particularly the US) to abandon 'rigid', legalistic notions of sovereignty and legitimize military intervention to defend human rights (Varadarajan, 1999). This was followed by the charter adopted by the 54-member Organisation for Security and Co-Operation in Europe in Istanbul in November 1999, which incorporated a 'principle' that takes interventionism a step further.

NATO's 'new strategic concept' has dominated defence policy thinking, as reflected on the pages of prestigious international security and international relations journals (Rubinstein, 1998; Lepgold, 1998; Daalder and O'Hanlon, 1999; Deutch et al., 1999; Rodman, 1999). It has been argued that the UN is not equipped to handle the new humanitarian crises. 'Actual military interventions are best left to regional organizations, such as NATO, or to coalitions of the willing that, for now at least, will generally have to have the United States at their core' (Daalder and O'Hanlon, 1999).

At its 50th birthday party in Washington in April 1999, NATO spoke of an extended role for the organization, arguing that the organization had to tackle 'uncertainty and instability in and around the Euro-Atlantic area and the possibility of regional crisis at the periphery of the alliance, which could evolve rapidly' (quoted in *International Herald Tribune*, 26 April 1999). William Cohen, US secretary of defence, argued in a piece on the day of the Washington summit that terrorism and ethnic hatred was the biggest threat to world peace and NATO should be mobile enough to go to the crisis before the crisis comes to us. 'It would be a folly', he wrote, 'to sit within our borders and simply wait for these evils to befall our people' (Cohen, 1999).

As a commentator counselled:

The stakes for NATO in constructing a viable peace-operations mission are large. At a time when many citizens in the developed world hardly think about security at all in traditional military terms, maintaining and using armed forces of any size and expense requires public justification and some demonstrable impact on policy outcomes with which people can identify. Peace operations could meet at least some of that need. (Lepgold, 1998: 106)

The Kosovo conflict was also good news for the defence contractors. As a result of the war, a number of NATO's European members accelerated their efforts to acquire Global Positioning System (GPS)-

guided air-launched munitions (Cook, 1999), while Raytheon, the US defence electronic group, won an £800 million government contract in June 1999 to provide Britain with a new breed of spy plane (Gow, 1999). One tangible outcome of the expansion of NATO means that defence spending will increase among Europe's NATO partners. It would cost the EU up to US\$250 billion a year to boost defence outlays from the current 2 percent of European GDP to the 3 percent in the US. The bombing created a push for European defence industry restructuring (Goldgeier, 1999; Baker and Echikson, 1999).

The Kosovo crisis signalled the triumph of US public diplomacy, succeeding in changing the character of NATO, the world's most powerful defence alliance and redrawing the rules of international relations. Apart from the human tragedy, the so-called 'humanitarian' mission cost US\$11 billion in warfare alone. A further US\$60 billion of damage was inflicted by the bombing. In the end, Operation Allied Force was what British playwright Harold Pinter called 'a bandit action', in whose legitimization, television channels such as CNN played a crucial role (BBC, 1999a, 1999c).

The analysis of CNN's coverage of NATO's bombing reveals a pattern in presenting the action as a humanitarian intervention. This is consistent with the tendency of the mainstream news media to follow the US agenda during military conflicts in the post-Cold War world.

Note

1. In addition to daily *Worldview* news reports from 12 March 1999 to 12 June 1999, the following CNN programmes were monitored — *Worldview* special reports on Kosovo on 22, 23 and 28 March 1999; *Insight* on 12 and 25 March, 22 and 23 April, 6 May, 3, 10 and 11 June 1999.

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