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## Western war reporting is selective and the real stories of the Kosovan crisis remain largely untold

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Last week, 14 members of the same Iraqi family were reportedly killed when their house was hit by a missile. There were no military installations nearby.

On August 11, an unconfirmed number of people died when a 4th-century Christian monastery was bombed as they gathered to watch the solar eclipse. In May, a friend travelling in northern Iraq came upon the remains of a flock of sheep with blast injuries. A shepherd and his family of six had been bombed to death on one day, his sheep the next. Apart from a news-in-brief item in the Guardian, this was not news in Britain.

Such acts of murder are routine, carried out by US and British pilots over Iraq. "We do not target civilians" and "pilots are defending themselves", say the foreign office. It is a deceit reminiscent of the long-running lie that Hawk aircraft were not operating in East Timor. Mostly, lying is unnecessary, as Orwell pointed out in the preface to *Animal Farm*, when "inconvenient facts [are] kept dark". A recent Unicef report that child deaths in Iraq had doubled to half a million briefly broke the silence, presumably because it was "measured" - that is, it usefully shifted the blame a few centimetres from the Anglo-American-led sanctions to the Iraqi regime.

Numerous other studies on the suffering of the civilian population of Iraq have been ignored or buried. A Unicef report in 1997, which left no doubt that the malnourishment of a million children was caused by "the impact of sanctions", was confined largely to an article in the *Economist*. In 1995, the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation concluded that "the moral, financial and political standing of the international community intent on maintaining economic sanctions is challenged by the estimate that since August 1990, 567,000 children in Iraq have died as a consequence." That is four times the number of children who died at Hiroshima.

According to the Guardian's data base, it was reported in two paragraphs in this newspaper and the *Times*, and in one sentence in the *Financial Times*. There was no political debate, and there is none now. The prime minister is never required to defend policies which, by the definition of various international conventions, are genocidal.

Unpeople are a common phenomenon in the media age. Victims are deemed worthy or unworthy, depending on the degree of western culpability. Since the "just war" in the Balkans, more than 170,000 Serbs have been "ethnically cleansed" from their homes in Kosovo in the same way that ethnic Albanians were driven out.

This is equal to the number of Serbs forced out of Krajina seven years ago by the Croatian regime and its US state department backers. Many Serbs fleeing Kosovo are survivors of the Krajina atrocity. Now they are as much victims of Nato's ethnic hate campaign as they are of Albanian gangs, whose intimidation and murder extends to Montenegrins and Roma.

Is this news? Sort of. Several exceptional pieces of reporting come to mind. Otherwise, it is well on the way to news-in-brief. The drum-beaters are long silent, having testily assured the prime minister's press spokesman that they did as good a job of propaganda as he did.

Silent, too, is the effete bomber himself, whose "moral crusade" was dutifully elevated from the crapulous to every front page and BBC bulletin and whose "new internationalism where the brutal repression of whole ethnic groups will no longer be tolerated" is now revealed to be fake as Nato presides over precisely that repression in Kosovo.

The truth behind all this, which Harold Pinter calls "the depth of shame", is that untold thousands of innocent Serbs and ethnic Albanians, victims of Nato's "war," would be alive today had western leaders pursued three outstanding opportunities for peace. Two were at the Rambouillet talks: in February when Robin Cook boasted to parliament of agreement on 90% of peace terms which the Serbs were prepared to sign, then in March, when the Serbs were again 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's occupation.

On top of this, the elected Yugoslav parliament, on March 23, called on the UN to negotiate a diplomatic solution leading "toward the reaching of a political agreement on a wide-ranging autonomy for Kosovo." Almost all of this remains unknown to the British public. Neither was the complete list of Nato targets hit ever published or broadcast. This shows not "blunders" but an unmistakable pattern of civilian terrorism: hospitals, schools, nurseries, housing estates, power sources, markets, farms, churches, monasteries, against which horrific "anti-personnel" cluster bombs were used.

A group of prominent international lawyers argue that if the recent indictment of Slobodan Milosevic is to be credible, not merely victor's justice, then the evidence against all prima facie war criminals should be heard. They have prepared a compelling indictment of Nato's leaders, including Blair, Robertson and Cook. That is the news.

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