Human Rights or “Human Rights Imperialism”? Lessons from the War against Yugoslavia

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HUMAN RIGHTS OR "HUMAN RIGHTS IMPERIALISM"?
LESSONS FROM THE WAR AGAINST YUGOSLAVIA

On April 4, 1999, after one week of bombing in Yugoslavia, I published an op-ed piece in my local newspaper1 condemning NATO actions and predicting that they would ultimately lead to greater instability, more war crimes and increased demands on U.S. military power, because of the diminution of the right of national sovereignty and the loss of U.N. influence. I focused too narrowly on the costs borne by Americans asked to carry out aggressive U.S. military policy. The thousands of innocent civilians who died as a result of the bombing of Yugoslavia and Kosovo, and the hundreds of thousands of civilians in Kosovo who were displaced only after the bombing began, and who have not been resettled or provided with the means to rebuild their lives, are paying a much higher cost than any American was asked to bear, in what became a war limited to high altitude bombing with no U.S. combat casualties.

Unfortunately, my prediction that the bombing would have a destabilizing impact on international affairs, because of its implications for undermining the principle of national sovereignty, has been proven all too accurate, as shown by the reactions of China, Greece and many other countries.2 And, although the U.N. is nominally in charge of “peacekeeping” and rebuilding a shattered Kosovo it is plain that U.S.-NATO military forces will determine the geo-political future of the Balkans for the foreseeable future. The U.N. lacks the political and diplomatic influence to directly oppose U.S.-NATO military operations in Europe, irrespective of their legality.

Whether this war was really about human rights, or whether it was more akin to the use of human rights claims to justify acts of aggression may be less obvious. The answers to three specific questions can help clarify this.

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First, did the bombing accomplish the stated "human rights" or strategic objectives of NATO? Second, are the claimed objectives credible as the real reasons for the bombing? Finally, if the answers to these questions are negative, what are the unstated reasons behind the first post WW II aerial bombing of a European state by the U.S. and its allies?

"Human Rights" and the Results of the War against Yugoslavia

It is useful to consider the situation before and after the bombing, in light of the supposed humanitarian aims of protecting the Kosovar Albanian population from ethnic cleansing and other human rights violations, to see what was accomplished in terms of the physical well-being and security of the populations of Kosovo and Yugoslavia.

- Prior to the bombing, the Yugoslav economy was functioning at a relatively high level. Even though there were economic sanctions imposed on the Milosevic government, the people of Yugoslavia, including Kosovo, were able to provide for most of their basic needs. After the bombing, the economy of the entire region is in shambles and people are existing on less than a dollar a day.³

- Before the bombing, according to monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Kosovo, fighting between Yugoslav government forces and armed KLA insurgents resulted in about 2,000 deaths the previous year. These were mainly combatants in a rebellion against a recognized government. Human Rights Watch reported that after the war, 2,500 bodies were found in Kosovo and more than 2,100 Yugoslav civilians were killed by NATO bombs.⁴

- OSCE observers, who had been in Kosovo for many months, said there was no refugee problem of any significant dimension before the bombing. Afterward, numerous reports related that 300,000 people in Kosovo and many in Yugoslavia faced a winter without adequate shelter or employment and civil society in Kosovo was replaced with a form of gangsterism.⁵

- Before the bombing, there was discrimination by Belgrade, hostility between the Albanian majority and the Serb minority, fighting between Government and KLA forces and atrocities undoubtedly committed by both sides. OSCE monitors, however, reported no systematic "ethnic cleansing."⁶ Now, there is widely reported "ethnic cleansing" by remnants of the KLA and other ethnic Albanians, who have driven some 250,000 Serbs, Rom and other minorities out of Kosovo and created precisely the "ethnically pure state" that NATO said it was trying to prevent.⁷

- At the time of the bombing, U.S. Defense Secretary William Cohen claimed that "100,000 Kosovar men had disappeared" and were presumed to have been victims of "mass extermination campaigns on the order of Hitler's Holocaust."⁸ NATO claims of mass extermination of Kosovars have been
proven false and there have been no confirmed mass disappearances.
While the Yugoslav Army conflict with the KLA in Kosovo has certainly
been eliminated, the New York Times reported in March that KLA units
were reassembling in southern Yugoslavia.9

In light of the realities of life in Kosovo today, it is very difficult to con-
clude that the bombing advanced human rights in any significant way. Que-
sions about “what was actually accomplished by the bombing” are now being
posed by many observers and are even being heard on the floor of the Senate
from Sen. John Warner, not known for his opposition to U.S. military policy.10

In fact, although the Prosecutor for the War Crimes Tribunal declined to
undertake an investigation of NATO war crimes requested in a petition filed
by lawyers and jurists from Canada, the U.S. and Europe, both Human Rights
Watch and Amnesty International have issued reports that make clear that
NATO itself committed numerous human rights violations during the war.11
The bombing of civilians and civilian targets as the war progressed makes
any U.S.-NATO claims to moral or legal superiority questionable at best.

Creating a Reason to Bomb:
the Secret “Appendix B” at Rambouillet

In evaluating whether human rights violations and intransigence by Yugo-
slavia were the actual causes of the war against Yugoslavia, one must exam-
ine the so-called Rambouillet “negotiations,” which were not really negotia-
tions at all. The day before the bombing began on March 24, NATO pre-
sented Yugoslavia with a document, not publicized in the U.S., called “Ap-
pendix B, paragraph 8.”12 It demanded unrestricted U.S.-NATO military ac-
cess to Yugoslav territory and ultimate control over even the domestic policy
of Yugoslavia. It also called for a referendum on independence to be held in
Kosovo after three years of NATO occupation. No nation could accept a de-
mand for complete military occupation and for ceding sovereignty over all its
territory.

Madeleine Albright acknowledged on her flight to Rambouillet that it was
intended for Yugoslavia not to meet these demands so the bombing could be
justified. This was not reported in the U.S. press until long after the war had
ended.13

The Serb Parliament agreed to all the U.S-NATO demands, except these
two.14 Instead of NATO occupation, the Parliament proposed a return of the
international OSCE monitors who had been expelled by the U.S. on March
19 and agreed to U.N. oversight of Kosovo. It also agreed to negotiate the
future political status of Kosovo.

As pointed out by Michael Mandelbaum in a recent issue of Foreign Af-
fairs, NATO agreed to conditions very close to those that Yugoslavia had
offered before the bombing began and gained few of their stated strategic objectives that had not already been agreed to by the Yugoslav government at Rambouillet.\textsuperscript{15}

It is obvious that NATO failed to achieve its strategic political objectives. The “peace” resulted from the United States and NATO abandoning the unpublicized demands Yugoslavia rejected in the first place. But NATO did so only after the bombing of civilians, the destruction of the relatively advanced Yugoslavian economic infrastructure and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of refugees.

The NATO war also failed to accomplish the stated strategic military objective of destroying or significantly “degrading” the Serbian military capacity. It is now widely conceded that the Serbs had learned lessons from the Iraq War and made such successful use of decoys and planned mobility that there was little damage done to their troops or military hardware.\textsuperscript{16}

Once the U.S.-NATO adopted the strategy of high altitude bombing of Serbian civilian population centers, civilian deaths and destruction of the Yugoslavian economy were inevitable. In Kosovo, it was predictable that massive bombing would lead to the creation of a refugee crisis that would require massive humanitarian assistance for the Kosovars, irrespective of the actions of the Serbian military. It was also predictable that Kosovo would require massive economic aid after the bombing. In spite of U.S.-NATO claims of humanitarian purpose, little of this support for the Kosovars had materialized more than a year after the end of the war.

When these predictable, and apparently avoidable, NATO-created human tragedies are combined with Secretary of Defense William Cohen’s outright lies about the extent of Serb atrocities and the obvious dissembling by Madeleine Albright about the Rambouillet “negotiations,” it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the invasion used a claimed “humanitarian” purpose as a justification for other aims.

If “human rights” were neither advanced by, nor a credible reason for, the bombing of Yugoslavia and if the stated strategic goals of the U.S.-NATO military force were not achieved, what was driving U.S.-NATO policy? Why did the bombing begin, and what was accomplished from the point of view of the “victors”?\textsuperscript{17}

**Human Rights Imperialism: the New, “New World Order”**

In a March 1998 article, published in *Monthly Review* long before the bombing in Yugoslavia began, Professors Uwe Jens Heuer and Gregor Shirmer, of the Party of Democratic Socialism in the German Parliament, characterized the then emerging U.S. policy as *human rights imperialism*.\textsuperscript{18} A year before the bombing began, they predicted that the U.S. and NATO would
eventually use human rights as an excuse for military intervention with imperial aims. *Human rights imperialism* may well be the best description for the policy we saw in Kosovo. But, before a discussion of the war against Yugoslavia is possible, it is necessary to consider the wider political and economic context in which the bombing campaign occurred.

"Globalization" as the Backdrop to the War against Yugoslavia

U.S. military and foreign policy must be seen in the context of the general trend of the internationalization of capital and the accompanying pressures to bend *all* government policy worldwide to meet the needs of international finance capital. In short, U.S. policy in Yugoslavia must be viewed through the prism of "globalization" that is the centerpiece of all U.S. foreign and domestic policy. The phenomenon of globalization is affecting *all* aspects of U.S. government policy today, both foreign and domestic.

World-wide, this process has two major policy trends, one associated with the European Union and another associated with the United States and Great Britain. Privatization of government functions is one major feature of the United States/Great Britain version of globalization. Deregulation of limits on trade and capital investment to allow the free flow of capital both domestically and internationally is a second feature, particularly apparent in U.S. "free trade" policy. At times, this has put the U.S. at odds with both Europe and Japan. Mergers and downsizing are a third feature, intended to substitute low wage jobs for well paid employment. This shift is also a feature of the privatization of governmental services.

The European Union policy is similar, although with less emphasis on privatization and deregulation. The Euro-strategy includes a high level of unemployment alongside relatively high wages, as is occurring in Germany. It also attempts to spread employment by reducing the work week, as we have seen in France. However, both the U.S./U.K. and continental European strategies have the same general goal, the domination of *all* aspects of society and international relations by market forces and global capital.

The recent meeting of the world's capitalist leaders in Davos, Switzerland demonstrated this difference in tactics. The U.S. pushed for the complete elimination of regulations or limitations on the flow of capital. Others, including George Soros (who may have profited more from unrestricted capital flows than anyone in history), argued that the growing worldwide disparity between rich and poor creates instability and, in the long run, threatens the collapse of the international capitalist system.

The mechanisms being used to accomplish this historic shift of power from governments to private capital include the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) in the area of trade regulations. NAFTA has led to competition to reduce wages in North
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America and allows private companies to sue the governments for the costs of environmental and other social controls imposed by democratic governments. The WTO applies worldwide and would allow bureaucrats associated with major corporations to eliminate trade barriers established for social or political reasons. This has been seen recently in the banana trade, environmental controls on gasoline additives and the genetic modification issues.²³

In international finance, the U.S.-dominated World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) use the power of debt refinancing to impose market oriented policies that force governments to "restructure" their economies by taxing the poorest of their own citizens to pay for debt created by ruling elites. Mahatir Mohamad, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, which rejected World Bank-IMF "bailouts" after the recent Asian economic collapse, has explained that the result of this "debt restructuring" is the destruction of domestic economies, the domination of multi-national investors and a new form of economic imperialism.²⁴

A third prong of assault by international capital on governmental restrictions, in addition to NAFTA and the WTO, is the proposed Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) which would eliminate, by international treaty, the power of any government to place any limitation on international capital investment flows. The MAI was initially defeated because of massive international public pressure, but it is certain to return in a variety of forms.²⁵

All these institutions are aimed at opening the world to the domination of private capital, making human rights subservient to international capital and eliminating democratic limitations on capital "to make all people slaves to private finance capital."²⁶

Democrats and Republicans agree that domestic U.S. policy should follow and support this general trend. The Democrats pushed through NAFTA and have been responsible for the largest cutback in welfare programs since they were established in the Roosevelt Administration. Democrats and Republicans both want to privatize governmental services and turn them over to profit-making enterprises. Despite some disagreements that surfaced at the recent meeting in Seattle, when the Democrats concluded they could not risk alienating labor before the 2000 elections, both parties fully support the WTO, differing only as to its scope.

The question is, how are these trends in "globalization" related to the U.S.-NATO war in Yugoslavia and U.S. foreign and military policy for the year 2000 and beyond? The use and threat of force always lurk in the background of U.S. foreign policy to emerge when the World Bank/IMF and WTO/NAFTA, are not sufficient to assure compliance with the general trend of opening all economies to the domination of market capitalism. U.S. military policy serves these ends, so Americans must be made to acquiesce in the
use of military power when other means falter. As predicted by Heuer and Shirmer, *human rights imperialism* appears to be the mechanism chosen by U.S. policy makers to rationalize their naked exercise of power.\(^7\) The War against Yugoslavia is the first test case of this policy for the New Millennium.

**U.S. Military Strategy in the “A Single Super-Power” Age**

In addition to these “economic globalization” factors, one must also consider the collapse of the Soviet Bloc and the resulting elimination of any military counterbalance to U.S. power. For almost 50 years after World War II, it was necessary for United States military planners to consider the potentially devastating consequences of military conflict with the Soviet Union before *any* foreign adventure outside of the Americas could be undertaken. This is no longer the case.

Furthermore, the technological superiority demonstrated by the U.S. in Iraq, together with the “War from 30,000 Feet” waged against Yugoslavia, served notice upon *all* nations that terrible violence is possible anywhere on earth with little risk to U.S. forces. Although the Yugoslav military learned from the Iraqi defeat and protected most of its assets, widespread damage was visited on the whole of the Yugoslavian economic infrastructure with little meaningful military resistance.

**Worldwide Application of the “Latin American” Model**

In many ways, the military policy of the United States worldwide is coming to resemble the military policy that for two centuries has been directed toward South America. The complete military dominance the United States has enjoyed in the Western Hemisphere, and the related economic domination of Latin American markets and resources, is now being projected worldwide. Nations are on notice that resistance to U.S. strategic aims can have terrible consequences for which there is no defense, and precious little effective military deterrence, as Latin American nations have experienced since the announcement of the Monroe Doctrine in the early 1800’s.

If U.S. worldwide military policy is coming to resemble the military imbalance that characterizes the north-south relations in Latin America, it is useful to recall that history when considering current U.S. military policy in the Balkans and elsewhere. For example, El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua were destabilized by the United States for much of the last century. Panama is a creation of U.S. imperial policy and was recently invaded when it served U.S. interests to remove Manuel Noriega as president. The United States carried out assassinations and trained the military elites of those countries, a practice that continues.

The U.S. overturned a duly elected government in Chile and supported the Pinochet dictatorship. In Peru, it supports the most repressive regime in
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the Americas, touting it as a "model" for Latin America. Countries in the region are once again becoming unstable because of internal problems arising from vast disparities of wealth. The list of violations of human rights and national sovereignty by the U.S. in Central and South America is voluminous. The illegal 40-year blockade of Cuba, after a failed invasion attempt, deserves special mention as an example of the military and economic aggression that results from resistance to U.S. domination.

Colombia is now the largest recipient of U.S. foreign military aid, after Israel and Egypt, to the tune of $300 million. There is now a proposal before Congress to increase that by $1.6 billion. Supposedly, these funds are to fight a "Drug War" that most responsible analysts have concluded has already been lost because of the failure to address domestic drug consumption issues within the United States.

Of course, what is really at issue in Colombia is a 40-year civil war caused by the poverty of most Colombians and the vast wealth of a few. This gives rise to the possibility of a government in Colombia willing to resist U.S. domination. More than 1,000,000 Colombians are refugees in their own country as a result of U.S. policies, far more than the number the U.S. even claimed were displaced by Serbs in Kosovo. The real purpose of the aid is military control of a region that has economic and strategic significance for continuing U.S. domination of the region. History counsels that direct military intervention is the next step, should aid to the Colombia military prove insufficient.

Similarly, in other parts of the world in which it was not directly restrained by the military counterweight of the Soviet Union, the U.S. has intervened militarily and politically to project its strategic advantage in ways that ignored national sovereignty and human rights. In Asia, we are very familiar with the example of Viet Nam and the continued U.S. military presence in Korea, Japan and, until a mass movement dislodged it, the Philippines. The United States encouraged Indonesia to invade and occupy East Timor. The U.S. and the U.N. supported the elections but did nothing to protect the East Timorese people from the predictable results of the plebiscite on independence. In Cambodia, the U.S. supported the Khmer Rouge as a counterweight to Viet Nam. The "Killing Fields" were sown with seeds grown in the U.S. State Department "greenhouse."

In Africa, there was long-term U.S. support for apartheid in South Africa; the assassination of Lumumba, support for the bloody Mobutu regime in Zaire (now the Congo) and Savimbi in Angola, the ill-fated intervention in Somalia and the recent, admittedly unjustified, bombing of a pharmaceutical plant in the Sudan. The lack of intervention during the slaughter of hundreds of thousands in Rwanda and now the lack of intervention in Sierra Leone demon-
strate that "human rights" violators have nothing to fear from U.S. foreign policy if they are in a strategically unimportant part of the world.

Seen in this light, the bombing of Yugoslavia is merely the European variant of longstanding U.S. government policy to project its influence by using military force when other methods fail. Because of the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, it is now possible to extend that policy to Europe, an area in which Soviet power made military intervention impossible until recently. "Human rights" have not been at the heart of American foreign policy elsewhere and to suggest that such a concern is reason for the bombing of Yugoslav ignores most of the history of U.S. foreign policy.

The "Indispensable" Nation Theory: A Recipe for International Domination and Destabilization

The policy of projecting U.S. power wherever strategically possible has been articulated by both Republican and Democratic administrations as the "indispensable nation theory." Under this theory, the U.S. must dominate all aspects of world interaction because, as the sole superpower, it is the "indispensable nation" to resolve all disputes anywhere. However, even 95 year-old George Kennan, the author of the "containment policy" directed at the Soviet Union after World War II that led to the Cold War, has warned that, in the long run, this policy will be disastrous. It is, according to him, the wrong policy for this time in history. He wrote, "We are not really all that great. We have serious problems within our society. The best help we could give others would be for them to observe that we are confronting our own problems."

The "indispensable nation theory" is also at the heart of U.S. disdain for the limitations on the use of military power established by international bodies and international law. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the U.S. has used the United Nations as a political cover when a U.N. "figleaf" suits its policy, and ignored it when it so chose. In Iraq, for example, the United States got U.N. approval to support the war against Saddam Hussein because of Iraq's refusal to recognize Kuwait's sovereignty. Military action was carried out almost exclusively by the U.S. and Britain and when Iraq agreed to the terms imposed by the U.N. allies, the U.S. continued bombing. It does so to this day, in violation of the U.N. mandate and in spite of objections from other countries. Ironically, the attack on Yugoslavia's sovereignty violated precisely the same body of international law that Iraq had violated.

With respect to the long term implications of this policy, Harvard's Samuel Huntington, writing in Foreign Affairs, reminds us that two-thirds of the world's population — the Chinese, Russians, Indians, Arabs, Muslims and Africans — see the United States, "as the single greatest external threat to their societies. . . . It's intrusive, interventionist, hypocritical, engaging in fi-
nancial imperialism and intellectual imperialism." After Yugoslavia, these nations know that the U.S. is willing to impose its will even in Europe with the most powerful military force the world has ever seen.

The Dismembering of Yugoslavia "According to Plan"

These overarching geopolitical considerations are at the heart of the reasons for the War Against Yugoslavia. The strategy for NATO military intervention in Yugoslavia was publicly announced as early as 1991. In that year, Zbigniew Brzezinski, foreign policy advisor to numerous United States presidents, authored The Grand Chess Board. It included a map of Europe which showed shaded areas indicating the extent of U.S. influence in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Soviet Union.

Brzezinski argued that nominally socialist Yugoslavia was the European state least open to U.S. and European Union economic penetration. He discussed the shifting political alliances necessary to allow more market penetration in the former Socialist countries, particularly Yugoslavia. He argued that market penetration in Eastern Europe could not be accomplished solely by means of international agreements. It would need a military "fist." The book was a blueprint for the eventual breakup of Yugoslavia and U.S.-NATO intervention.

The dual tactics of international economic pressure, together with the threat and eventual application of the "fist" were systematically applied to the Yugoslav Federation in the 1990's. World Bank-IMF external pressures stressed the Yugoslav economy by requiring onerous debt repayment schedules. These pressures increased already existing economic disparities between the north and south by forcing repayments that had to be extracted from the industrialized north. When viewed in conjunction with the Brzezinski strategy articulated in 1991, it seems apparent that policy makers were well aware that the IMF pressure would encourage destabilization of the Yugoslav state.

The conclusion that this was a conscious strategy is reinforced by the immediate grants of diplomatic recognition accorded the breakaway Slovenian Republic by both Germany and the United States within hours after it declared independence. Slovenia has also long been part of what the Germans consider their "area of influence" in central Europe. In Croatia, which also has historic connections to Germany, the U.S. and Germany granted immediate diplomatic immunity to the Tudjman government even though its members were known to have connections to Balkan Nazi sympathizers.

The connection between the shift in military policy and market penetration in Eastern Europe was clearly displayed when representatives from the various NATO countries met in Washington, D.C. for NATO's 50th Anniversary "Celebration." The party was funded entirely by donations from multi-
national corporations. In order to get a seat at the NATO table at which the new military policy was rubber-stamped, multinational corporations had to come up with a minimum donation of $250,000.39

Cooperation and Competition: Behind the “Human Rights Mask” of NATO/Corporate Complicity

The general trend of cooperation/competition, discussed earlier in the context of the Davos meetings, also characterizes all of the relationships between the advanced capitalist states of Europe both among themselves [as seen in Britain’s reluctance to enter the “Euro” monetary regime] and between the U.S. and European capital [as seen in the conflicts over genetically modified foods]. To appreciate the dual nature of this relationship, and how it shapes U.S.-NATO policy in Eastern Europe, one must consider the economic and political relationships that exist between any highly developed industrial economy, and less developed neighboring economies. As noted, similar relationships have existed between North America and its southern neighbors for at least a century.

After the demise of the “socialist bloc,” it is now possible, and almost imperative, for continental European capital to “colonize” the economies, people and resources of Eastern Europe. Germany leads this process. Even without Brzezinski’s maps, the inexorable pressure of European capital’s penetration into eastern markets is quite evident. The industrial nations of Europe, along with the U.S., cooperated through NATO to expand their influence eastward by dismantling and militarily weakening Yugoslavia, the only state which had demonstrated some ability to resist market penetration and which possessed an independent military force not subservient to NATO.

To a certain extent, U.S. and European interests converge in opening free access to the markets and resources of the east. However, the benefits of an eastward expansion of the market is much greater for the nearby industrial economies of continental Europe and, in fact, the potential of unfettered eastward expansion of European industry and markets actually poses a potential long term threat to U.S. economic and strategic interests.

The development of the European Union, the opening of vast new markets and resources in the East and the recently proposed independent European military force,40 demonstrate that European and U.S. industrial centers have common interests in Eastern Europe market expansion. At the same time, they find themselves at odds. Should Europe develop fully integrated contiguous markets, a cheap labor pool, and free access to the resources in Eastern Europe that are outside the sphere of U.S. economic and military influence, it would present a very real threat to worldwide U.S. economic influence. Under these conditions, the U.S. and Britain share an interest in establishing and maintaining a military presence in Eastern Europe as a geopoliti-
cal counter-balance to the growing economic and potential military power of the advanced continental European powers.

In this respect, the War against Yugoslavia can be seen as an extension of the same geo-political forces that gave rise to the war against Iraq, a nation that represented a source of oil, free from U.S. economic control, that has the potential of fueling European industrial growth into the next century. U.S. and European industrial interests would both favor developing Black and Caspian Sea oil. The British-U.S. bombing of Iraq shows that, absent economic control, the U.S. and its closest non-continental European ally are prepared to maintain military control of the “off” switch on any independent, east-west source of oil for European (i.e., German) industry.

Prospects for the Future

After the bombing, the UN has been left to pick up the pieces of hundreds of thousands of shattered lives in Kosovo and the rest of Yugoslavia. Because the economy of the region has been destroyed, the Balkans are ripe for capital penetration from both the European Union and the U.S. East European markets, raw materials and, perhaps most importantly, Black and Caspian Sea oil are open to unimpeded western “development.” The Balkans are now open to “globalization” and any future reindustrialization of Yugoslavia will necessarily require investment from extra-national sources. For example, British investors have recently taken over mining operations in Kosovo. And the U.S. has a military presence in a part of Europe that is likely to have strategic significance long into the next century.41

It is now becoming clear that behind Adam Smith’s “Invisible Hand” in the global market place is Brzezinski’s “Mailed Fist” of U.S. military power, projected internationally through a redefined NATO and other military mechanisms. The word is that delivered to Latin America for 200 years: Resistance to U.S. economic interests has severe military consequences and neither national sovereignty nor human rights have practical meaning for U.S. policy makers.

Now that “Communism” can no longer be used, the “Drug War” will be claimed as the reason for intervention in some areas. In others, it will be “protecting the sovereignty of nations” or “eliminating weapons of mass destruction.” Elsewhere, it will be “defense of human rights.” The result will be the same: continued military conflict to assert and protect the geo-political interests of the market forces that are driving U.S. international and domestic policy.

The United States is not an “international policeman,” acting within the bounds of the law. Rather, it is a lawless “rogue cop” with unlimited power. It is the world’s most powerful, nuclear equipped, schoolyard bully and will not play by anyone else’s rules unless forced to do so. Without the existence of a
military counterbalance as a restraint on this power, the only alternatives are restraints imposed by diplomacy, by adherence to international legal norms and/or by mobilized, international public opinion.

Cracks in the Facade of Power

The War against Yugoslavia might appear to demonstrate the success of the policy of human rights imperialism, since the U.S.-NATO condominium claims to have "defeated" Milosevic. In reality, the results reveal significant weaknesses in the ability of the U.S. to apply this policy.

First, because of anticipated resistance by the American people to the use of U.S. land forces with its resulting casualties, it was necessary for U.S. military planners to carry out an air war. Although effective against undefended civilian targets, the bombing was apparently unable to inflict significant losses on the Yugoslav military that learned lessons from Iraqi losses.

Second, the duration of the conflict was limited, at least in part, by the rapidly growing domestic opposition. This domestic resistance will likely pose significant obstacles to any future U.S. administration that attempts to carry out a lengthy war, particularly one with significant casualties.

Third, international resistance was also building, necessitating rapid resolution. Support for NATO policy was unraveling in Europe and this is now manifested in disagreements about how to carry out the occupation of Kosovo. Around the world, popular opposition was forcing governments to take positions protecting their own sovereignty. The U.N. General Assembly provided a valuable forum for the mobilization of public opinion and governmental disapproval even as the formal role of the Security Council was diminished by unilateral NATO action.

Thus, in spite of the clear military superiority it currently holds, the U.S. was unable to accomplish all its stated objectives. While it did gain a strategic military toehold in Eastern Europe, the massive worldwide resistance made it impossible for the U.S. to act with complete impunity in a world in which mass political action can also be "globalized."

As suggested by William Greider in the Nation, after the "Battle in Seattle, it is increasingly clear that international solidarity is the antidote to the worst consequences of capitalist globalization, as exemplified by the mass mobilization to shut down the Seattle WTO meeting and the defeat of the MAI. In the absence of a military counterweight to the U.S., what is needed are international people's movements to: (a) build grass roots movements for peace and democracy that can impose limits on military-supported market forces on a worldwide scale; (b) expand the movement for a democratized U.N. structure that is capable of bringing international pressure to bear to limit U.S. military options; (c) expose phony human rights claims and other
excuses for intervention by powerful nations in domestic and international arenas; (d) oppose, through mass organizing and resistance, intervention by the military of the industrialized nations in the absence of U.N. approval; and (e) demand the strengthening of independent international judicial bodies that can apply human rights standards to the conduct of all nations, including the U.S.43

Conclusion

Notwithstanding the abuses of the Milosevic regime in relation to the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, claims of "human rights" protection as the reason for the U.S.-NATO war against Yugoslavia are less than credible. Although the bombing of Yugoslavia and Kosovo may have ended Serbian military operations in Kosovo, the reasons for the war can be more coherently explained as the result of geopolitical realignments owing to the collapse of the Soviet Bloc and the realpolitik of U.S./European globalization strategies.

In light of the reality of U.S. military preeminence, as well as the likelihood of future conflicts between capitalist powers, the war against Yugoslavia provides insights into both the strengths and the weaknesses of the U.S. in its role as the "sole superpower." It is necessary to organize domestically to oppose corporate control of government policy. Internationally, it is necessary to organize on the model that is developing in anti-WTO campaigns, to create, strengthen and democratize international institutions that have the potential to limit U.S. economic and military policy options.

Perhaps the major lesson activists can learn from the U.S.-NATO war against Yugoslavia is that as powerful as the U.S. is, it cannot carry out aggressive military policies with complete impunity. Domestic opposition to U.S. invasions, international pressure applied through international bodies and international mass public opinion can have an impact on altering U.S. policy. In the age of the "single superpower," the organization of this "people's campaign" may be the only feasible option.

NOTES


10. Id. As recently as 1987, the New York Times reported that ethnic discrimination and violence directed at Serbs by ethnic Albanians was the primary source of conflict in Kosovo. See, David Binder, In Yugoslavia, Rising Ethnic Strife Brings Fears of Worse Civil Conflict, N.Y. TIMES, Nov. 1, 1987, at 14.


17. Robert Fisk, a former reporter covering the U.S.-NATO war for THE INDEPENDENT of London, and others have opined that the extensive bombing campaign arose from U.S.-NATO miscalculating the will of Yugoslavia to resist NATO demands. Interview, “The Best of Our Knowledge” NPR, Jun.11, 2000. While this “test of wills” theory between Madelyn Albright and Slobodan Milosevic may be accurate, it does not explain the strategic planning, including the restructuring of NATO, itself, that preceded the demands for Yugoslav acquiescence to NATO authority. See, The Bloody Truth of How NATO Changed The Rules to Win a ‘Moral War’ Against Yugoslavia, THE INDEPENDENT, London, Feb. 7, 2000, at 3.


25. See, Maude Barlowe, Organizing to Stop the M.A.I. and the Privatization of Everything, 56 GUILD PRACTITIONER 1 (1999).


27. See Heuer and Shirmer, supra at note 18; The Kosovo Cover-Up, supra at note 16; Ellen Meiksins Wood, Kosovo And The New Imperialism; US And NATO Mark The Rise of Imperialism, 51 MONTHLY REVIEW 1 (Jun. 1, 1999).

28. Yadira Ferrer, Conflict-Colombia: Diplomatic Drive To Expedite U.S. Aid, INTER PRESS SERVICE, Jan. 12, 2000. Since this article was written, Congress has passed the aid package.


32. Id.

33. Perhaps the best example of the U.S. using international bodies to further its policy interests and ignoring them when they become inconvenient is the U.S.'s willingness to support limitations on sovereignty that serves economic interests, such as the WTO, etc. On the other hand, the U.S. refuses to support the formation of the International Criminal Court for fear it might find U.S. military options to be war crimes. See, Barbara Crossette, U.S. Pushes to Weaken World Court on Atrocities, N.Y.TIMES, Jun. 12, 2000, at A9.


36. Id.; George Grayson, STRANGE BEDFELLOWS, NATO MARCHES EAST (University Press, Mar. 1999)

37. The systematic economic pressure applied to the Yugoslav Federation is well documented, See, Nick Beams, Yugoslavia: Structural Adjustment and Dismemberment the Roots of the War, FINANCIAL EXPRESS, Apr. 28, 1999; John Pilger, Balkans: Arms Trade the Winner, THE GUARDIAN, Apr. 20, 1999.

38. Neither the U.S. nor NATO made any effort to stop the expulsion of 500,000 Serbs from the Krajina Region of Croatia, who have yet to receive any international assistance and remain refugees within Yugoslavia. This expulsion of Serbs was the first
example of massive "ethnic cleansing" in the Balkans in the 1990's.


43. As recently as June 12, 2000 the U.S. has continued to oppose the International Court of Justice, which is supported by some 120 nations, because it might impose liability on U.S. personnel. See, Crossette, supra, note 33.

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