

US, NATO threaten bombing in Yugoslavia

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NATO warplanes could strike targets in Yugoslavia within a week, US and European officials warned Friday after the collapse of talks outside Paris over the future of Kosovo province. Some 400 US and European warplanes are being readied to launch the air strikes, which would follow cruise missile launches from half a dozen US warships in the Adriatic and Mediterranean seas. The US planes, which make up fully half the NATO force, would include B-52 bombers equipped with additional cruise missiles.

In testimony before Congress Thursday, Pentagon officials said that targets had already been selected in Serbia, by far the largest of the two republics which comprise the Yugoslav state. Press reports from Europe indicated that US officials were insisting that the air attack, once launched, should escalate steadily into a full-scale assault on air defense and other military targets, without the breaks for diplomacy proposed by European officials.

Some 10,000 NATO troops have already arrived in Macedonia, which borders on Kosovo and Serbia, in preparation for entry into Kosovo if Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic agrees to the settlement proposed by the six-nation "contact group," which consists of the US, Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Russia. Under this plan, a force of 28,000 NATO troops, including 14,000 from France and Britain and 4,000 from the US, would occupy Kosovo while the Yugoslav Army withdraws from the province.

The size of the NATO troop deployment clearly suggests that its goal is not merely to police Kosovo, but to use the rebellious province as a launching pad for further military action against Belgrade. Three times as many troops would be used, in proportion to the population, as in the initial entry into Bosnia in 1995.

According to reports from Kosovo, Yugoslav Army troops are pouring into the province, entrenching themselves especially in the region near the border with Macedonia, the point of entry for NATO forces, and setting up anti-aircraft installations throughout the

mountainous region.

Amid all these signs of impending military catastrophe in the former Yugoslavia, the Clinton administration's policy in the region could be summed up as "bomb first, ask questions later." As Friday's *Washington Post* noted in its front-page report of the move towards military action, without any apparent irony: "Exactly what the objectives of the airstrikes would be have yet to be articulated by the administration."

Despite its humanitarian rhetoric, the perspective which Clinton outlined at his press conference amounted to an extraordinary expansion of the definition of the American "national interest," to include essentially every region in the world and the actions of every government. Not only does the United States assert that the entire globe is within its sphere of interest, it is prepared to use military force to compel submission to its political dictates, especially against smaller regional powers--so-called "rogue states" like Iraq, Serbia and North Korea--which appear as obstacles to US domination.

Clinton declared that American military intervention was necessary to compel Milosevic to restore the autonomy of Kosovo. He did not note--nor did any of the ignorant representatives of the American media who questioned him--that the autonomy of Kosovo was a feature of the constitution of Yugoslavia, a country which has since disintegrated. Nor did he explain why the United States, having supported such violations of the Yugoslav constitution as the secession of Slovenia and Croatia and the establishment of a Bosnian state, should suddenly decide to enforce that constitution with bombs and missiles.

Contradictions are piled on contradictions. Eight years ago Washington sent more than half a million troops to the Persian Gulf to attack Iraq, on the grounds that Saddam Hussein's invasion and annexation of Kuwait constituted an intolerable violation of national sovereignty and international borders. But in Kosovo, the United States and NATO are themselves engaged in a flagrant violation of national sovereignty and recognized

international borders.

The Clinton administration claims that its aim in Kosovo is to prevent further massacres of the majority Albanian population and to secure their right of self-government. But the US government is highly selective in its outrage over massacres and its demand for the right of autonomy or independence for national groupings.

No such concerns are voiced in relation to Turkey, where a far larger oppressed population--15 million Kurds--are held under even more brutal and onerous conditions than those which prevail in Kosovo. Turkey is one of the principal client states of American imperialism in the Middle East, and a keystone of US plans to intervene in the oil-rich--and Turkish-speaking--states of Central Asia. So there are no American denunciations of Turkish rulers over the suppression of the rights of the Kurds, and no American threats to bomb Ankara and Istanbul.

It was only three weeks ago that US intelligence agencies assisted Turkey in seizing Abdullah Ocalan, leader of the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK). Ocalan, who was pleading for the Turkish authorities to open talks on autonomy and democratic rights for the Kurdish people, now faces torture, trial and execution. While the Clinton administration hailed the abduction of the Kurdish guerrilla leader as a blow against "international terrorism," it will this weekend welcome a delegation of Kosovo Albanian guerrilla leaders to Washington.

Milosevic has overseen the brutal murder of thousands in Kosovo, just as he instigated the ethnic cleansing campaign by Serb forces in the Bosnian civil war. But similar methods have been employed by nationalist demagogues on all sides in the former Yugoslavia. Franjo Tudjman, the president of Croatia, is no less a war criminal than Milosevic, but he is a respected American ally.

The *Washington Post*, in an editorial on the crisis, declared that the only serious goal for American policy was the removal of what it called "the ultimate cause of the killing and destabilization in the Balkans--Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic." The truth is that the Balkans were the scene of fratricidal ethnic conflicts and great power meddling long before Milosevic was born. As in the case of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, the American ruling class seeks to demonize an individual in order to obscure complex historical and political issues and justify the use of military power.

And who is Washington to be the judge and jury? Clinton has just returned from a trip to Central America

where he stood before the Guatemalan legislature and publicly apologized for US support to three decades of genocidal warfare against that country's Mayan Indian population, in which 200,000 were slaughtered. Millions have died at the hands of American military forces and American-backed dictatorships in Asia, Africa and Latin America. A US-backed military intervention in the former Yugoslavia will only add to that death toll.

This is a foreign policy of extraordinary recklessness. As Clinton noted, the Kosovo crisis is "a conflict with no natural boundaries," which could rapidly draw in Albania, Macedonia, Greece, Turkey and other European states. American troops remain in Bosnia, three years after the date Clinton pledged they would be withdrawn. The Kosovo intervention raises the prospect of a period of indefinite, long-term American military engagement in the Balkan peninsula.

While Clinton refused to define any US strategic goals in this intervention, and the servile media conceals these considerations, there are real imperialist interests at stake in the impending intervention in Kosovo. The United States increasingly seeks to use its preponderance of military force to establish its hegemony throughout a vast region that extends from the Balkans, through Turkey and the Middle East and into Central Asia.

In the decade since the collapse of the Soviet Union, American foreign policy has more and more focused on attaining political, military and economic dominance throughout this region, which contains vital supplies of natural resources, including the bulk of the world's oil reserves. These are the real interests that underlie the preparations of the Pentagon to rain bombs and missiles on Belgrade and other Yugoslav cities and towns.



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