

Whom will the United States bomb next?

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Also in Serbo-Croatian

With the US-led bombing of Yugoslavia a new chapter has opened in America's use of military force around the world. In the public justifications given by Clinton and other American officials for the attack, the issue of Yugoslavia's national sovereignty has been ignored.

One does not have to be a supporter of the Serbian strongman and Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosovic and his brutal policies to acknowledge that Kosovo has long been recognized as part of Yugoslav territory. The present war establishes a new precedent, namely, the right of the most powerful capitalist powers, above all the United States, to militarily attack a country for the policies it carries out within its own borders.

This new doctrine has staggering and ominous implications. Less than a decade ago Washington felt constrained to justify its aggression against Iraq with the argument that Baghdad had opened itself up to attack by invading another country, Kuwait. The Bush administration, moreover, felt the need to secure the cover of United Nations authorization for the gulf war. Now, it seems, no such principles of international law are operable.

What then is the principled basis on which Washington has launched the current war? In his White House speech Wednesday night Clinton justified the bombing campaign on the grounds that NATO intervention was required to halt Belgrade's repression of the ethnic Albanians in the province of Kosovo.

His potted history of the conflict in the Balkans omitted the incendiary role of the US, Germany and other Western powers in precipitating the civil warfare in the region, and their continuing support for autocrats, such as Croatia's Franjo Tudjman, who have pursued a policy of ethnic cleansing no less ruthless than that carried out by Milosevic.

But even if one takes Clinton's arguments for good

coin, a critical question is posed: is the United States asserting its right, indeed, its obligation, to use its military might against all sovereign states that violate the rights of ethnic or national minorities living within their borders?

If this is the case, then Washington is obliged to radically alter its attitude to a long list of countries. It must, for example, embrace the cause of Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka and end its support for the regime in Colombo that continues to prosecute a bloody war against the Tamils in the northeast of that island nation.

It must prepare for military action against its present NATO ally Turkey, which conducts a policy of police-military repression against its substantial Kurdish minority even more savage than that pursued by Milosevic against the Kosovars.

What about Spain's decades-long suppression of the Basques? And Chechnya and Ossetia in Russia? Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan?

Moving further east, there is the explosive struggle of the Moslem population of India's Kashmir. The African continent is rife with conflicts of tribal minorities against dominant groups.

Let us not forget America's support for Israel, notwithstanding that country's decades-long suppression of Palestinian rights.

What about the national agitation of minorities on the very borders of the US, such as the Quebecois in Canada and the Mayan Indians of Chiapas, Mexico? Must not the Pentagon also train its sights on Ottawa and Mexico City?

What are the principled criteria by which Washington distinguishes legitimate struggles against national oppression in whose behalf bombs and missiles must be launched, and its yardsticks for determining which nations are to be attacked? In fact, no such criteria are ever advanced, for the simple reason that they do not

exist.

From this very partial list of ethnic and national flashpoints around the world, it is obvious that US policy is not based on some universal moral principle. On the contrary, Washington vigorously supports a whole host of countries that engage in the systematic suppression of national minorities.

In reality, the attitude of the US in any given case is determined by the prevailing conception within its ruling elite of American capitalism's economic and geopolitical interests. Even the beginning of an objective analysis demonstrates that Washington's policy is thoroughly opportunistic and hypocritical. To the extent that it is able to obscure this fact from the American people, the government is indebted to the media, not one of whose representatives dares to challenge the banalities and lies of Clinton, Madeleine Albright, and company.

The Clinton administration's rationale for bombing Yugoslavia advances a formula that can be used to justify US intervention anywhere in the world. As circumstances change, today's "fledgling democracy" can virtually overnight become tomorrow's "rogue state." It provides, moreover, a political framework for exploiting and manipulating the grievances of various national and ethnic groups not to advance the goals of peace, democracy or human rights, but to further the drive of US imperialism to dominate the world.

Such has long been the modus operandi of Western imperialism in the Balkans. Dating back to the last century, the great powers--Germany, Russia, Britain, France--posed as the champions of the various national and ethnic groupings in the region, often stoking up conflicts between them, in order to advance their rival claims and interests in Central Europe. At the end of the twentieth century, the US has emerged as the most cynical and ruthless exponent of this policy, with catastrophic results for the people of the region.

A column in Thursday's *Wall Street Journal* provides a particularly crass expression of this policy of manipulation. Written by Zalmay Khalilzad, director of strategic studies at RAND, it calls on the US to arm the Kosovo Liberation Army and use it as a counterforce against the regime in Belgrade. "As the balance of forces changes on the ground," the author writes, "Belgrade is likely to become more willing to accept Western demands."

Indicative of the recklessness that characterizes US policymakers, the *Journal* columnist declares that such a policy could be effective only if the US and NATO were prepared to station large troop concentrations in neighboring Albania, which would serve as a sanctuary for the KLA, as well as Macedonia. With unvarnished cynicism, Khalilzad notes, "Supporting an insurgency does not tie Washington's hands. The US could modulate its assistance to the Kosovars depending on how the situation develops in Kosovo and in Belgrade."

Where will Washington's formula for military intervention be applied next? Many of the flashpoints listed above are prime candidates for the next eruption of US militarism. And there are others.

The people of the world would be well advised to follow closely the emanations of the American media in the coming months. Should, for example, the *New York Times* or the network news suddenly develop a deep concern for the plight of Tibet, it would be wise to take this as evidence of a rising tide of anti-Chinese militarism in the US establishment.

No country, including America's closest "allies"--and most powerful rivals--in Europe and Asia, are ultimately safe. Behind the platitudes about peace and democracy, American imperialism is embarking on a policy of global domination with potentially catastrophic consequences.

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