

US-NATO bombs fall on Serbia: the "New World Order" takes shape

The editorial board
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Also in Serbo-Croatian

The editorial board of the *World Socialist Web Site* emphatically opposes the US-led NATO attack on Serbia. The massive air assault against a small country of less than ten million people is an act of naked imperialist aggression. It represents a qualitatively new stage in the eruption of American and European militarism.

As the British *Financial Times* pointed out: "The enormity of NATO launching its first attack against a sovereign state is not to be underestimated. Unlike Iraq, Belgrade has not invaded another country. Nor is the situation akin to Bosnia, where the legitimate government invited outside intervention. Nor, finally, has the United Nations Security Council specifically authorized NATO to bomb."

It is a telling commentary on the state of American democracy that the US government feels free to go to war without even bothering to offer a coherent explanation for its actions to its own people. Without even a trace of embarrassment President Clinton acknowledged, only hours before the bombing commenced, that most Americans probably would not be able to locate Kosovo on a world map.

Without a declaration of war--indeed, without anything that can even be remotely described as a public debate--the United States has commenced the bombing of another country which has not harmed, or even threatened, a single American citizen.

What is the logic of this policy? The United States assumes the right to compel countries to change their policies in accordance with American demands, i.e., to relinquish sovereignty within their own borders. Even as ruthless a practitioner of imperialist *realpolitik* as Henry Kissinger has warned that the war against Serbia represents an extraordinary and unprecedented redefinition of the "national interest"--which now, it would appear, includes the domestic policies of other countries.

Though it has not been explicitly stated, the implication of this new "Clinton Doctrine" is that the United States may bomb and even invade countries whose domestic policies are not to its liking. This doctrine implies that any country in the world is a potential target for US bombing. It would not be difficult--based on the present state of world affairs--to draw up a list of 10 to 20 countries that could be considered likely candidates for military attack by the United States. And, were a deterioration of world economic conditions to lead to an exacerbation of trade tensions, the size of that list could quickly double.

The aim of these assaults is to establish the role of the major imperialist powers--above all, the United States--as the unchallengeable arbiters of world affairs. The "New World Order" is precisely this: an international regime of unrelenting pressure and intimidation by the most powerful capitalist states against the weakest.

The attack on Serbia follows a definite pattern. In recent years, military interventions by the US have occurred with increasing frequency. In less than twelve months the US has bombed the Sudan and Afghanistan and is, with the support of Britain, conducting a permanent war against Iraq. It is impossible to separate the assault on Serbia from this chain of events.

The official reasons given for the military intervention are utterly hypocritical. According to German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, the bombing has been undertaken to prevent a "humanitarian catastrophe." According to British Prime Minister Tony Blair it is necessary to "save thousands of innocent men, women and children from death, barbarism and ethnic cleansing by a brutal dictator."

But looking back on the tragic consequences of the break-up of Yugoslavia, it is clear that humanitarian issues were the last concerns motivating the intervention of the big powers. In fact, the largest single act of ethnic cleansing carried out in the entire period--the Croatian army's expulsion of 100,000 Serbs from the Krajina region into Bosnia--was carried out with the approval of the German and American governments, and directly supervised by American personnel.

A *New York Times* front-page article last Sunday reported that the war crimes tribunal in the Hague has concluded the Croatian army carried out summary executions, the shelling of civilians and "ethnic cleansing," all of which occurred under the auspices of retired US military officers working in Croatia with the approval of Clinton and the Pentagon.

The *Times* report exposed the hypocrisy of the US government, which tailors its selective outrage over ethnic atrocities to its immediate military and geo-political aims. Three Croatian generals face indictment for the atrocities committed during the Krajina offensive, but the Pentagon opposes any legal action against them, claiming the shelling of Serb towns and villages was a "legitimate military action." Milosevic, denounced by Washington as an international outlaw, is giving the same rationale for his present policy of shelling and burning Albanian villages in Kosovo that the US gives for similar depredations against the Krajina Serbs.

Viewed within an international context, the indignation of Europe and the United States over massacres and the suppression of national rights is even more cynical. While it sheds crocodile tears over the fate of the Kosovars, the United States provides military and financial support for the suppression of national and ethnic minorities by right-wing regimes all over the world.

A case in point is Turkey, a NATO member and strategic US ally, which is conducting a savage war against the Kurdish population in its own country. Turkish policy towards the Kurds is even more ruthless than that carried out by Serbia against the Kosova Albanians. Turkey makes it a crime to acknowledge a Kurdish national identity, and its military violence in Kurdistan affects far more people than the Serbian repression of Kosovo Albanians. Nevertheless, Ankara has never been threatened with military raids, the Turkish military is provided with weapons and expertise by the German and American governments, and the leader of the Kurdish national movement, the PKK, has been handed over, thanks to US intervention, to his Turkish hangmen.

In the air war against Serbia, military force has become its own *raison d'être*. As NATO governments and the media insist, the maintenance of NATO's credibility demands that the US and its allies bomb now, because they have repeatedly threatened to do so in the past. Typical were the

remarks of the German paper *Die Welt*, which declared, "NATO must strike," because not to strike "would have consequences going far beyond the conflict in Kosovo. Its authority as a military and political protecting power would be destroyed..."

The *World Socialist Web Site* has no sympathy for Milosevic, nor does it support his policies. He is a former Stalinist bureaucrat, turned rabid nationalist and defender of bourgeois property, who tramples on the democratic and social rights of the people. In this respect he is not fundamentally different from Russian president Boris Yeltsin and many other heroes of the Western media.

However, the attempt to reduce the complex historical and political issues of the Balkans to the machinations of one bad man whose supposed thirst for power is the source of evil in the world is patently absurd. Given the traumatic experiences of Serbian history, no political leader--even one with none of the characteristics attributed to Milosevic--could have accepted the humiliating ultimatum delivered by the Contact Group of imperialist nations. Acceptance would amount to sanctioning foreign troops on Serbian territory and surrendering sovereignty over an area considered part of the Serbian state since the withdrawal of the Ottoman empire last century.

In 1914 an ultimatum by the Habsburg empire, threatening Serbian sovereignty in a similar way, triggered World War I. During World War II several hundred thousand Serbs fell victim to a genocidal assault supported by the German occupation army. With these memories still present, and with the German army returning to the stage of international war in the bombing of Serbia, the refusal to accept the US-sponsored ultimatum can hardly be blamed on Milosevic alone.

Indeed, the Western powers worked closely with Milosevic in implementing the ethnic carve-up of Bosnia under the Dayton agreement. The present war is directed not primarily against Milosevic, but rather against the Serbian population and the Balkan people as a whole.

The Kosovo Albanians, in whose behalf the war is supposedly being waged, will be amongst its main victims. With a huge part of the Serbian army concentrated in and around Kosovo, the province will inevitably become one of the main theaters of military conflict, with high civilian casualties.

According to a German government briefing of parliamentary leaders, NATO's plan, should Serbia not give in after extensive bombardment, is to escalate the political and military offensive by backing the secession of Kosovo from Serbia and equipping the Kosovo Albanians with modern weapons.

The conflict in Kosovo must be placed in its historical context. Its cause is not the personality of Milosevic, but the breakup of Yugoslavia, which is the combined product of the collapse of Stalinist rule and the intervention of the major capitalist powers, especially Germany and the United States.

It was German support for the secession of Slovenia, and even more so its promotion of an independent Croatia in 1991, that triggered a series of nationalist eruptions, including the Bosnian civil war, the Croatian expulsion of the Krajina Serbs, and the Serbian crackdown in Kosovo. The NATO powers have intervened throughout the past decade to inflame and exploit national and ethnic tensions for their own purposes. None of the nationalist politicians in the former Yugoslavia and none of the Great Powers come to Kosovo with clean hands.

There is little reason to believe that the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), should it take power in Kosovo, would behave differently than Milosevic, Croatia's Tudjmann, the Bosnian Moslem leaders, or other nationalist politicians in the region. Nothing in the KLA's past record indicates that it would treat the 180,000 Serbs living in the area differently than the Croatian army dealt with the Krajina Serbs.

The removal of Serb military forces would likely be followed by the mass expulsion of the Kosovo Serbs. Serbian resistance would likely be

met with KLA massacres as bloody as those being carried out against the ethnic Albanians by Milosevic's forces today. As the recent history of the Balkans, Rwanda and other international flash points has tragically demonstrated, those subjected to "ethnic cleansing" and national oppression at one point can, at the prompting of their own bourgeois nationalist leaders, become the perpetrators of such crimes at the next point.

The international press has provided extensive reports of the suffering of the Kosovo Albanians and their persecution at the hands of Serbian forces. But it has said little about the estimated 15,000 Serbs who have fled villages for towns in Kosovo since the beginning of open conflict in spring 1998.

According to a report issued by the Institute of War & Peace Reporting: "From late April until the end of June last year, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) undertook a series of offensives and took control of nearly 40 per cent of Kosovo. Serbs who lived in the villages under KLA control left their homes--sometimes of their own free will and sometimes forcibly, after their closest kin had been abducted and their houses surrounded and attacked with small-arms fire."

The NATO attack on Serbia will have incalculable consequences for the stability of the entire region. It threatens renewed civil war in Bosnia, destabilizes Albania and Macedonia, and undermines the rump of Serb-controlled Yugoslavia. Belgrade could face the secession of Montenegro and ethnic unrest in the province of Vojvodina, which has no majority population, but large minorities of Serbs, Croats, Hungarians and Romanians.

According to the German news magazine *Der Spiegel*, "Neighboring Macedonia, whose territory is greedily observed by the bordering states, would inevitably be drawn into the conflict: 420,000 Albanians live there. And the mother country Albania could militarily intervene on behalf of its embattled compatriots in Kosovo--a general Balkan war could hardly be avoided."

In the final analysis, the escalating spiral of war, civil war and ethnic cleansing which has beset the Balkans demonstrates the historically reactionary character of the entire structure of national states carved out of the former Yugoslavia. As a result of the political interference and military intervention of the imperialist powers, the Balkans have been "re-Balkanized" in a manner that precludes both economic progress and the development of genuinely democratic conditions.

This policy, motivated by the most short-term considerations, may prove to have consequences far more serious than those anticipated by the Clinton administration. The decision by Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov, on the way to an official visit to Washington, to turn his plane around and go back to Moscow, and President Boris Yeltsin's subsequent decision to sever all ties with NATO, provide an indication of the destabilizing impact of these events on Europe as a whole.

A possible consequence is the emergence of an extreme nationalist regime in Russia. Already there are reports that Russia may supply arms to the Serbs if fighting develops on a large scale.

One of the three new additions to NATO, Hungary, has no common border with any NATO country, but does have a common border with Serbia, and clashes could break out there. The fragile relations between Turkey and Greece, both members of NATO and perpetually on the brink of war, could rapidly deteriorate should the war spread to Macedonia.

There are innumerable factors in this crisis that lend to the prevailing situation a tremendous degree of unpredictability. But the following can be said with certainty: whatever may emerge from the destruction and death produced by this latest eruption of US-NATO violence, it will be neither the peace nor the justice so fatuously promised to the peoples of the Balkans by President Clinton.



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