US attitude toward "ethnic cleansing" depends on who's doing it

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3 April 1999

In his address at Norfolk Naval Air Station on April 1, President Bill Clinton proclaimed yet again that the bombing of Serbia has been undertaken "to stand with our allies in NATO against the unspeakable brutality in Kosovo."

The United States was morally compelled to take this stand in defense of human rights, he insisted.

"Now, we can't respond to every tragedy in every corner of the world, but just because we can't do everything for everyone doesn't mean that, for the sake of consistency, we should do nothing for no one.

"Remember now, these atrocities are happening at the doorstep of NATO, which has preserved the security of Europe for 50 years because of the alliance between the United States and our allies."

That is, in essence, the administration's argument. The US and NATO are committed to the defense of human rights. Though it is not always possible to intervene against violations of human rights, there is an inescapable imperative to do so when the atrocities are taking place on NATO's "doorstep."

"Are we," asked Clinton, "in the last year of the twentieth century, going to look the other way as entire peoples in Europe are forced to abandon their homelands or die, or are we going to impose a price on that kind of conduct and seek to end it."

Let us go back some 15 months, to December 1997, and recall an event that was not too widely covered in the American press--the visit of Mesut Yilmaz, the prime minister of Turkey, to the United States. Commenting on the significance of US-Turkish relations, Clinton declared:

"First of all, I think it is very important that we do everything reasonable to anchor Turkey to the West. They are a secular Islamic government that has been a dependable ally in NATO. They have also supported a lot of our operations in and around Iraq since the Gulf War. And they have been a good ally of ours. I think that is terribly important. If you look at the size of the country, if you look at its geo-strategic significance, where it is, what it can block and what it can open the doors to, it is terribly important."

For three days, from December 18 through 21, 1997, Yilmaz was feted, wined and dined in Washington. In addition to his talks with Clinton, the Turkish prime minister met Vice President Gore, and the secretaries of State, Defense, Commerce and Energy. He met as well with officials of the IMF, the World Bank, and the CEOs of several major US corporations. One of the high points of the trip was the signing of a contract with Boeing, worth about $2.5 billion.

A slightly discordant note was sounded when administration officials broached the question of human rights, but the topic did little to disturb the cordial atmosphere. A State Department official, James B. Foley, assured reporters at a briefing that followed Yilmaz's departure that the prime minister had offered assurances that the human rights situation was steadily improving. A reporter asked if the State Department had gone over a checklist to verify that the improvements claimed by Yilmaz had actually been made.

"With a close friend and ally, we don't have a checklist," Foley replied. "We have a dialogue, productive dialogue."

The reporter did not press the issue. Had he chosen to do so, he might have asked Foley to comment on the *Report on Human Rights Practices in Turkey* that was issued by the State Department in January 1997. This report demonstrates that the repressive measures that have been taken by the Turkish government against the Kurdish minority surpass in scale and brutality even the measures of the Serb army in Kosovo.

Noting that a state of emergency has existed in nine southeastern provinces since 1984, the State Department report acknowledged as a matter of fact that the Turkish government "has long denied its Kurdish population, located largely in the southeast, basic cultural and linguistic rights. As part of its fight against the PKK [Kurdistan Workers Party], the Government forcibly displaced large numbers of noncombatants, tortured civilians, and abridged freedom of expression."

The report noted, "Estimates of the total number of [Kurdish] villagers forcibly evacuated from their homes since the conflict began vary widely: between 330,000 and 2 million. A credible estimate given by a former member of parliament from the region is around 560,000."

The gross violations of human rights by the Turkish authorities are not limited to the brutal repression of the Kurdish minority. According to the State Department report: "Extrajudicial killings, including deaths in detention, from the excessive use of force, in safe house raids, and 'mystery killings,' continued to occur with disturbing frequency.

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Disappearances also continued. Torture remains widespread: Police and security forces often abused detainees and employed torture during periods of incommunicado detention and interrogation. Prolonged pretrial detention and lengthy trials continue to be problems."

Examining the prevalence of torture in Turkey, the report noted that "The HRF's [Human Rights Foundation] torture rehabilitation centers in Ankara, Izmir, Istanbul, and Adana reported that they accepted a total of 354 credible applications for treatment in the first six months of 1996. A total of 713 applications were received in 1995. Human rights attorneys and physicians who treat victims of torture say that most persons detained for or suspected of political crimes usually suffer some torture during periods of incommunicado detention in police stations and Jandarma [Gendarme] headquarters before they are brought before court. Government officials admit that torture occurs. Although they deny that torture is systematic, they explained its occurrence by stating that it is closely tied to the State's fight against terrorism.... Many cases of torture, however, occur in western Turkey, outside the zone of conflict."

According to the report, "Commonly employed methods of torture alleged by the HRF's torture treatment centers include: high-pressure cold water hoses, electric shocks, beating on the soles of the feet, beating of the genitalia, hanging by the arms, blindfolding, sleep deprivation, deprivation of clothing, systematic beatings, and vaginal and anal rape with truncheons and, in some instances, gun barrels. Other forms of torture were sexual abuse, submersion in cold water, use of truncheons, hanging sand bags on detainees' necks, forcing detainees to stand on one foot, releasing drops of water on their heads, and withholding food."

Pressure is placed on physicians not to report evidence of torture. The report states: "Members of security and police forces often stay in the examination room when physicians are examining detainees, resulting in intimidation of both the detainee and the physician. Physicians responded to the coercion by refraining from examining detainees, performing cursory examinations and not reporting findings, or reporting physical findings but not drawing reasonable medical inferences that torture occurred. Sixty percent of the physicians surveyed believe that 'nearly everyone who is detained is tortured.'... Doctors and other health-care professionals in a state of emergency region have been killed, tortured, imprisoned, internally exiled, and legally sanctioned in the course of their professional duties."

At the center of the Clinton administration's propaganda war against the Serbian government is the claim that it is engaged in "ethnic cleansing," i.e., the forcible eviction of Kosovar Albanians from their villages in Kosovo. According to the latest press accounts, the total number of Kosovans "ethnically cleansed" since the war began is in the area of 150,000.

The report of the State Department establishes that the Turkish government has practiced "ethnic cleansing" against its Kurdish minority on an even wider scale. Let us quote the findings of Madam Albright's human rights staff:

"The exact number of persons forcibly displaced from villages in the southeast since 1984 is unknown. Most estimates agree that 2,600 to 3,000 villages and hamlets have been depopulated. A few nongovernmental organizations have put the number of people forcibly displaced as high as 2 million. The official census figures for 1990--before large-scale forced evacuations began--indicate that the total population for the 10 southeastern provinces then under emergency rule was between 4 to 4.5 million people, half of them in rural areas. Since all rural areas in the southeast have not been depopulated, the estimate of two million evacuees is probably too high. On the low end, the Interior Minister stated in July that the total number of evacuees was 330, 000.

"Rapidly growing demands for social services in the cities indicate that migration from the countryside has been far higher than this figure. Although the urbanization is also accounted for in part by voluntary migration for economic or educational reasons also related to the conflict, the figure given by a former MP from the region--560,000--appears to be the most credible estimate of those forcibly evacuated."

The State Department classifies Turkey as a European power. Indeed, it is, unlike Serbia, a member of NATO. But notwithstanding the facts revealed in the report issued by the US State Department, Turkey is not being subjected to a violent media campaign for its violations of human rights, let alone being bombed by the United States. Rather, Turkey is participating in the onslaught against Serbia.

Only one month ago, the United States provided the Turkish government with the critical political and logistical support that it required to kidnap the leader of the PKK, Abdullah Ocalan. This is how the United States carries out "a productive dialogue" with a murderous regime that serves the interests of American imperialism.

Is it really necessary to argue, given the facts presented above (culled from an official US Government report), that the attempt to present the assault against Serbia as some sort of Holy War in defense of human rights is a colossal political fraud?

[The text of the report that I have cited may be accessed on the Internet at http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/hrp_reports_mainhp.html]

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