

A Conservative Lord warns of global turmoil

Nick Beams
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The world could see a return to the same economic, political and military turmoil that characterised the first 50 years of this century, if the new doctrine unveiled by NATO in the war against Serbia is extended.

That was one of the central themes of a series of lectures delivered in Sydney and Melbourne this week by Lord Robert Skidelsky, the Conservative Party's spokesman on economic affairs in the British House of Lords and the author of a major study on the economist John Maynard Keynes.

Skidelsky said NATO's war against Serbia was the outcome of a new doctrine of "ethical imperialism," which had disturbing implications.

"The new principle seems to be that states can be sanctioned or punished whenever they mistreat some of their subjects. How acceptable is this likely to be in a world where many states do, in fact, mistreat their subjects?

"Where does this lead us in international relations?" he asked. "Any attempt by the US and its allies to impose their values on the rest of the world will inevitably lead to the break-up of the world polity and with it the break-up of the world economy."

He said the dominant doctrine after World War II had been that of national sovereignty, that nations should manage their own affairs without interference from outside. But this had been overturned.

In a later newspaper interview he said that if NATO were not seen as the guarantor of national independence then this would lead countries to re-arm.

Skidelsky took up recent remarks by British Prime Minister Tony Blair who has based his foreign policy on the security and political implications of globalisation. In a speech to the Chicago Economic Club last month Blair insisted that "non-interference" long considered "an important principle of international order ... must be qualified" and that "conflicts and violations of human rights" in other countries could not

be ignored "if we want still to be secure".

There were a series of disturbing questions raised by this new doctrine, Skidelsky said.

"There are actual or potential conflicts going on all over the world. How many wars will NATO need to fight to secure minority rights? What does not walking away after the bombing has done its worst really mean? Do you create a desert by bombing and then occupying the ruins?"

Skidelsky pointed to precedents for the new doctrine. A half-forgotten aspect of the imperialism of the 19th century was that in its decay it had acquired an ethical justification, summed up in phrases like "the white man's burden".

Besides issuing warnings about the implications of the new NATO doctrine, Skidelsky pointed to the instability of the global capitalist economy. He said the case for floating exchange rates and the unregulated movement of capital had been seriously undermined by recent events.

"To continue without rules is to risk the destruction of the free market over much of the world and a 21st century which will resemble the worst of our own rather than the best of the 19th."

A comment on the significance of Lord Skidelsky's remarks will appear on the WSWS next week.



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