

Historical Roots of the US “War on Terrorism”: The Pathology of a Single Superpower. NATO and Beyond

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Global Research Editor’s Note

This incisive and carefully researched article originally published by Covert Action Quarterly in 1999 sheds light with tremendous foresight on the historical evolution of the US led “War on Terrorism” and the articulation of what has been described as “Global NATO”.

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Michel Chossudovsky, December 5, 2012

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright referred to the August 1998 missile assaults against Sudan and Afghanistan (allegedly in retaliation for the U.S. embassy bombings in Africa two weeks earlier) as “unfortunately, the war of the future.” (1) In one sense, she was lamenting the likelihood of various Islamic forces retaliating against American civilian targets.

There is, as Albright understands, another side to these wars, more than guided missiles launched from a thousand miles away, with no danger to U.S. troops. American military strategy calls for “the use of overwhelming force to minimize United States casualties.”(2) But it is not that simple. Former CIA Director Robert Gates was more precise:

“[O]ur people and our Government must accept another reality: as potential official American targets are ‘hardened,’ terrorists will simply turn to non-official targets—businesses, schools, tourists and so on. We can perhaps channel the threat away from the United States Government, but not away from Americans.”(3)

What grand scheme, then, is in place, that may bring these “unfortunate” wars back home, against civilians? Recent U.S. strategy, to implement the administration’s self-appointed role as global policeman, is now defined by its evolving military unilateralism, at home and abroad.

The Pathology of a Single Superpower

With the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the U.S. at last realized its objective to be the world's only superpower. Though Washington-and Wall Street-had always been possessed of a rapacious ambition to control the world's economy (what "globalization" is all about), there is now the conviction in many quarters that it is developing the military capability to do so. The acting Secretary of the Air Force, F. Whitten Peters, described the development as "learning a new kind of military operations [sic] in a new world."(4)

It is unrealistic simply to wipe out every non-compliant government; and a few are too powerful for such a strategy. So the U.S. had devised a more comprehensive plan, and now, after some 20 years, is approaching its millennial end game. One critical element has been a redefinition of the "enemy," in order to disguise greed as a dispassionate desire to spread western "democracy." Its complement has been the development of a military strategy for employing that definition to globalize U.S. power.

The New Enemy

It is commonplace to say that terrorism has replaced communism as the new enemy of western democracy. But this replacement has been selectively applied, geared to the goals of U.S. global hegemony. Washington's characterization of a foreign government can change radically when little or nothing has changed in that country. The Clinton administration's most recent pledge of more billions for defense came as the Pentagon upgraded North Korea, Iran, and Iraq, which they call "rogue" states, as no longer "distant" threats of possible nuclear missile attacks, an official position they had held only a few weeks before.(5)

Of course, when this happens, it ought to raise eyebrows among the citizenry. That it doesn't is often blamed on the average American's notoriously short political memory, but it is really due to the remarkable ability of the media to accept new policies, new "enemies," new "threats," without ever acknowledging their prior, unquestioning acceptance of the old ones.(6)

Enemies can become friends overnight, too. Recent events in Kosovo demonstrate how quickly and how hypocritically the U.S. government recharacterizes a situation when it suits their needs. The Kosovo Liberation Army was branded a "terrorist organization" in early 1998, but by mid-year U.S. officials, including Richard Holbrooke, were meeting with its leaders, while claiming they were not in favor of Kosovan secession and the resulting inevitability of a "Greater Albania." Holbrooke was uncharacteristically frank: "I think the Serbs should get out of here."(7)

Ironically, after the CIA financed, armed, and trained Islamic "friends" in Afghanistan, President Clinton now believes that the threat they pose may justify creating a new military command at home to fight terrorism. As we go to press, he is weighing Pentagon advice to establish a commander-in-chief for the defense of the continental U.S., a first in peace time. [More next issue.]

WMD and NATO

The government and its media spin artists have incited western fears by tarring enemy states like Iraq with the brush of "weapons of mass destruction" so repeatedly that the acronym WMD is now current jargon. Part of the "new vision" for NATO, discussed below, is

to focus on WMD as a justification for military strikes anywhere, either as deterrence or as “preemptive retaliation.” The campaign around WMD is described as “a microcosm for the new NATO, and for its larger debates and dilemmas.”(8) None of the analyses, however, point out that the U.S. is the only nation that has used all of these weapons-chemical, biological, and nuclear.

The U.S. has employed biological weapons for 200 years, from smallpox in the blankets of Native Americans to spreading plagues in Cuba; from chemical weapons like mustard gas to cripple and kill in World War I to Agent Orange to defoliate Vietnam-and to create a generation of deformed children. It is the only nation that has dropped nuclear bombs, and one that now makes, uses, and sells depleted uranium weapons.

The chemical weapons charges levied against Iraq are fraught with irony. When Iraq was at war with Iran, and the U.S. considered Iran the greater enemy (a view that changed under Israeli pressure), it was facilitating the sale of chemical weapons to Iraq.(9) The weapons inspectors in Iraq claimed that their inventories of “unaccounted for” WMDs came from boxes of secret Iraqi documents discovered “hidden on a chicken farm near Baghdad,”(10) but there were easier ways to have compiled such inventories-like reviewing the CIA’s reports of the secret arms deals it brokered in the 1980s.

Taking Control

For the U.S., the United Nations has been a double-edged sword. Because of its Security Council veto, it can frustrate actions it opposes, but cannot always force actions it wishes.

Thus the U.S. has fostered-and funded-U.N. tribunals to punish alleged war crimes in Bosnia and in Rwanda, but would never allow such extraterritorial tribunals to investigate crimes against humanity in Indonesia, for example, or in any of its other client states. For this reason, the U.S. refuses to ratify the proposed International Criminal Court and opposes the trial of Augusto Pinochet in Spain. (11)

Where geographically possible, the military planners have turned increasingly to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which Secretary Albright described as “our institution of choice.”(12) NATO is not “hostage” to U.N. resolutions, one “strategic analyst” said.(13) A U.S. “official” explained that the U.N. “figures in this as far as possible,” but that the new definition of NATO is meant to include the possibility of action without U.N. mandate.(14)

A Times editorial warned against “transforming the alliance into a global strike force against threats to American and European interests.”(15) But Secretary Albright reaffirmed that the shift is from collective defense of the NATO members’ territory to “the broader concept of the defense of our common interests.”(16) This means, in practical terms, the U.S. forcing the NATO imprimatur on military interventions in the internal affairs of sovereign states that are not members of the alliance.(17)

Kosovo

The most obvious and illegal expansion of NATO’s mandate has been its intervention in Kosovo. As we go to press, NATO is voting whether to authorize air strikes against the Serbian military. The rationale for the Clinton administration’s push for the bombing is described as to “do something” for the sake of “credibility,” especially because President Milosevic might “belittle the celebration marking the West’s triumph over Communism,”

planned for April in Washington.(18) He might otherwise, one Pentagon official feared, try to turn the celebration into a “Kosovo summit.”(19)

After President Milosevic agreed to allow a monitoring (“verifying”) team into Kosovo, the U.S. chose career diplomat William Walker to head the mission, under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.(20) Walker, when U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, oversaw and condoned some of the most brutal oppression and murder in the Western hemisphere.

The UNSCOM Scam

U.S. abuse of the U.N.’s mandate became apparent in the UNSCOM Scam. For some time, United Nations Special Commission inspectors in Iraq had attempted to gain access to President Hussein’s homes and similar sites on the unlikely excuse that they could be CBW laboratories or storehouses. The media continually berated Saddam Hussein when he claimed that espionage was involved. Nonetheless, it came as a surprise to some to learn in January that U.S. spies had been operating against Iraq under cover as UNSCOM inspectors. To add insult to injury, Iraq had been forced to pay for the inspectors from its “oil for food” program income.(21)

UNSCOM was always beholden to the United States. From 1991 to 1997, UNSCOM had no U.N. budget, “but existed on handouts, especially from Washington,” (22) like the Hague Tribunal on Yugoslavia. He who pays the piper calls the tune.

Acting Alone

The U.S. has increasingly preferred NATO to the U.N. to avoid having its militaristic adventures vetoed. But with some disagreements within NATO as well, the Pentagon has taken to acting alone, or with a compliant ally. The August attacks on Sudan and Afghanistan were examples of totally unilateral military action by the U.S. The recent bombing of Iraq, a joint U.S.-U.K. operation, was taken without consulting either the U.N. or NATO. As one reporter noted, “the global coalition arrayed against [Saddam Hussein] in the gulf war has been badly frayed. The United States and Britain are its only steadfast members.”(23) The arrogance of such an action (compounded by the repeated failure of its rationale, the removal of Saddam Hussein, and by the UNSCOM scandal), has generated considerable anger around the world, albeit mostly by people and governments that can do little or nothing about it but voice a “growing resentment.”(24)

However, some of that resentment has clout. Russia, China, and India have all voiced concerns, and the recent air strikes may have prompted Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov’s informal proposal for a strategic alliance between the three nations. While visiting India to discuss the initiative at the time of the attacks, he said, “We are very negative about the use of force bypassing the Security Council.”(25) France and Canada also withdrew support. To the consternation of the Americans, France, has formally ended its support for the embargo on Iraq, forcing a reexamination of sanctions and the tightly restricted “oil for food” program.(26)

The “Parallel NATO”

Notwithstanding resentment and opposition, Washington is forging ahead with complex, ambitious, and risky plans, if not to supplant, at least to rival NATO, whenever it balks at

American cowboy operations. The program is already well entrenched in Eastern Europe, where the Pentagon has bilateral military programs in 13 countries. Plans to expand into the Caucasus and former Soviet Asia are in the works.(27)

The result “is an informal alliance that parallels NATO, but is more acutely reliant on its American benefactor.”(28) Another consequence of this operation is that “the Pentagon is eclipsing the State Department as the most visible agent of U.S. foreign policy.”(29)

Funding for some of the programs has an Orwellian flair. The U.S. European Command in Stuttgart runs a program called the Joint Contact Team Program, which was, according to the Washington Post, “initially paid for from a discretionary fund held by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. To work within congressional prohibitions of training foreign troops, the visits by U.S. military experts are called ‘exchanges’ and the experts are called ‘contact teams’ rather than trainers.”(30)

One of the convenient side effects of the operation is the astonishing expansion of U.S. arms sales to the region. Eastern Europe “has become the largest recipient of U.S.-funded military equipment transfers after the Middle East.” Some Eastern Europeans are justifiably concerned about “whether the United States is fueling a regional arms race.”(31)

Another sobering aspect of the Pentagon’s preeminence is its growing collaboration with the Central Intelligence Agency. “Ever since the Persian Gulf war, when military commanders and CIA officials became convinced of the need for closer coordination between their services, planning for covert missions has been conducted jointly.”(32)

The New Balkanization

The western powers, having successfully re-Balkanized the Balkans, find this Nineteenth Century tactic to their liking. Indications are that there is a serious and far-flung effort under way to Balkanize Africa, redrawing its borders. Three of the largest nations on that continent, Congo, Angola, and Sudan, face violent struggles to divide their territories. In Angola and Sudan, the rebellions, supported quite actively by the U.S., have gone on for years. The move to divide the Congo, however, began only after the recent overthrow of Mobutu Sese Seko, the greedy dictator whom the U.S. had installed and kept in power for more than 30 years.

Learning from the breakups both of the Soviet Union and of Yugoslavia, or more to the point, having long planned for such eventualities, the U.S. recognizes that it is easier to dominate a region when the governmental units are small. Already the media parrots are taking the cue, after years of silence on the subject. A recent, perhaps prophetic, piece in the New York Times, makes the point:

The borders of African nations, set up arbitrarily by the Europeans who colonized the continent a century ago, are supposed to be inviolable. Yet Congo is now split in two, perhaps for good.(33)

Although the Organization of African Unity enshrined the colonial borders in its 1963 charter, and has generally seen them respected for 35 years, the western powers now purport to blame themselves for having imposed these unnatural divisions upon the hapless Africans.(34) This, of course, encourages Balkanization and eases the path to further domination.

In some cases, U.S. strategy is more convoluted and Machiavellian. In the Sudan, for example, it has long been evident that the U.S. wants to keep the rebels sufficiently viable to avoid defeat, but not strong enough to pose a serious threat of the government's overthrow. "Peace," an "official" is quoted as saying, "does not necessarily suit American interests.... 'An unstable Sudan amounts to a stable Egypt.'"(35)

The Consequences

Perhaps we act alone because we have to act alone. Former CIA Director Robert Gates hinted about future wars when he wrote:

"Another unacknowledged and unpleasant reality is that a more militant approach toward terrorism would, in virtually all cases, require us to act violently and alone. No other power will join us on a crusade against terrorism."(36)

But, the terrorists having been created, the crusade goes on.

Notes:

1. New York Times, Aug. 23, 1998, p. 21. And see Sudan article in this issue.
2. James Risen, "Pentagon Planners Give New Meaning to 'Over the Top,'" New York Times, Sept. 20, 1998, p. 18.3. Robert M. Gates, "What War Looks Like Now," New York Times, Aug. 16, 1998, p. 15. 4. "The Pentagon After the Cold War," Aerospace America, Nov. 1998, p. 42.
5. New York Times, Jan. 21, 1999, p. A7.
6. Recall that Mobutu became a "dictator" in the press only when his overthrow was imminent; for thirty years, while he brutally raped the Congo, he was our anti-communist ally, Mr. President. And the New York Times always referred to the "Pinochet government" succeeding the "Marxist Allende regime," even though Allende was elected and Pinochet took power in a coup.
7. Chris Hedges, "U.S. Envoy Meets Kosovo Rebels, Who Reject Truce Call," New York Times, June 25, 1998, p. A6.
8. At the upcoming NATO celebrations in April, the U.S. is to propose a "NATO Center for Weapons of Mass Destruction." Steven Erlanger, "U.S. to Propose NATO Take On Increased Roles," New York Times, Dec. 7, 1998, p. A1.
9. Most notably through Chilean arms dealer Carlos Cardoen. See Ari Ben-Menashe, Profits of War (New York: Sheridan Square, 1992), passim. Cardoen vigorously denied any links to the CIA until his company was indicted in the U.S., when he immediately invoked the CIA-knew-all-about-it defense.
10. William J. Broad and Judith Miller, "Germs, Atoms and Poison Gas: the Iraqi Shell Game," New York Times, Dec. 20, 1998, p. 5.
11. See "The Pinochet Principle" in this issue, p. 46.
12. Roger Cohen, "NATO Shatters Old Limits in the Name of Preventing Evil," New York

Times, Oct. 18, 1998, Sec. 4, p. 3.

13. Ibid.

14. William Pfaff, "Washington's New Vision for NATO Could Be Divisive," Los Angeles Times, Dec. 5, 1998.

15. "New Visions for NATO," New York Times, Dec. 7, 1998, p. A24. Alexander Vershbow, the U.S. representative to NATO, immediately responded, in a letter to the editor, that there are "no such proposals." The new strategy, he said, "will not turn the alliance into a global police force, but will affirm NATO's adaptability in tackling new risks, like regional instability, weapons of mass destruction, and terrorism."

16. Steven Erlanger, "U.S. to Propose NATO Take On Increased Roles," New York Times, Dec. 7, 1998, p. A12.

17. "The Holbrooke-Milosevic agreement on Kosovo in October was accurately described by Richard Holbrooke as an unprecedented event. NATO had intervened in an internal conflict inside a sovereign non-NATO state, not to defend its own members but to force that other state to halt repression of a rebellious ethnic minority." Op. cit., n. 14.

18. New York Times, Jan. 21, 1999, p. A3.

19. Ibid.

20. Walker reminded his audience at a Washington briefing that, while he spoke on behalf of the OSCE and the Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM), he was still "a serving career [U.S.] Foreign Service Officer." Department of State release, Jan. 8, 1999.

21. The revelations, which first appeared in the Washington Post and the Boston Globe, and then belatedly in the New York Times, caused a "furor." Tim Weiner, "U.S. Used U.N. Team to Place Spy Device in Iraq, Aides Say," New York Times, Jan. 8, 1999, p. A1. An unnamed "senior intelligence official" quoted in the Times said that the news "should not shock people." An also unnamed U.N. official said it would be "naive" to have thought otherwise.

22. Barbara Crossette, "Reports of Spying Dim Outlook for Inspections," New York Times, Jan. 8, 1999, p. A8.

23. Tim Weiner, "U.S. Long View on Iraq: Patience in Containing the Ever-Deadlier Hussein," New York Times, Jan. 3, 1999, p. 10.

24. Richard N. Haass, the director of foreign policy studies at the Brookings Institution, describes the concern as a "growing resentment factor." Serge Schmemmann, "Attacks Breed a Complex Unease About U.S. Goals," New York Times, Dec. 20, 1998, p. 21.

25. BBC World Service, Dec. 21, 1998.

26. Barbara Crossette, "France, in Break With U.S., Urges End to Iraq Embargo," New York Times, Jan. 14, 1999, p. A6.

27. Dana Priest, "U.S. Military Builds Alliances Across Europe," Washington Post, Dec. 14, 1998, p. A1.

28. Ibid., p. A28.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Op. cit., n. 2.

33. Ian Fisher with Norimitsu Onishi, "Congo's Struggle May Unleash Broad Strife to Redraw Africa," New York Times, Jan. 12, 1999, p. A1.

34. Typical is Howard French's long article, "The African Question: Who Is to Blame?" New York Times, Jan. 16, 1999, p. B7. The subhead reads, "The Finger Points to the West, And Congo Is a Harsh Example."

35. James C. McKinley, Jr., "Sudan's Calamity: Only the Starving Favor Peace," New York Times, July 23, 1998.

36. Op. cit., n. 3.

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