

NATO: the Imperial Pitbull

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One of the deceptive clichés of Western accounts of post World War II history is that NATO was constructed as a defensive arrangement to block the threat of a Soviet attack on Western Europe. This is false. It is true that Western propaganda played up the Soviet menace, but many key U.S. and Western European statesmen recognized that a Soviet invasion was not a real threat. The Soviet Union had been devastated, and while in possession of a large army it was exhausted and needed time for recuperation. The United States was riding high, the war had revitalized its economy, it suffered no war damage, and it had the atomic bomb in its arsenal, which it had displayed to the Soviet Union by killing a quarter of a million Japanese civilians at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Hitting the Soviet Union before it recovered or had atomic weapons was discussed in Washington, even if rejected in favor of “containment,” economic warfare, and other forms of destabilization. NSC 68, dated April 1950, while decrying the great Soviet menace, explicitly called for a program of destabilization aimed at regime change in that country, finally achieved in 1991.

Thus, even hardliner John Foster Dulles stated back in 1949 that “ I do not know of any responsible high official, military or civilian...in this government or any other government, who believes that the Soviet now plans conquest by open military aggression.” But note Dulles’ language—“open military aggression.” The “threat” was more a matter of possible Soviet support to left political groups and parties in Western Europe. Senator Arthur Vandenberg, a prime mover of NATO, openly stated that the function of a NATO military buildup would be “chiefly for the practical purpose of assuring adequate defense against internal subversion.” The much greater support of rightwing forces by the United States was, of course, not a help to internal subversion, and a threat to democracy; only possible Soviet help to the left fit that category. (Recall Adlai Stevenson’s claim in the late 1960s that the resistance within South Vietnam by indigenous forces hostile to the U.S.-imposed minority regime was “internal aggression.”)

The non-German Western European elites were more worried about German revival and a German threat, and, like U.S. officials, were more concerned about keeping down the power of the left in Europe than any Soviet military threat—and the United States was pressing the Europeans to build up their armed forces, and buy arms from U.S. suppliers! Although knowingly inflated or even concocted, the Soviet military threat was still very useful in discrediting the left by tying it to Stalin and bolshevism and an alleged Soviet invasion and mythical world conquest program.

In fact, the Warsaw Pact was far more a “defensive” arrangement than NATO; its organization followed that of NATO and was clearly a response, and it was a structure of the weaker party and with less reliable members. And in the end, it collapsed, whereas NATO was important in the long-term process of destabilizing and dismantling the Soviet regime. For one thing, NATO’s armament and strength were part of the U.S. strategy of

forcing the Soviets to spend resources on arms rather than provide for the welfare, happiness and loyalty of their population. It also encouraged repression by creating a genuine security threat, which, again, would damage popular loyalty and the reputation of the state abroad. Throughout this early period the Soviet leaders tried hard to negotiate some kind of peace settlement with the West, including giving up East Germany, but the United States and hence its European allies-clients would have none of it.

As noted, in the U.S. official-hence mainstream media- view, only Soviet intervention in Western Europe after World War II was bad and threatened "internal subversion." But in a non-Orwellian world it would be recognized that the United States far outdid the Soviet Union in supporting not only "internal subversion" but also real terrorism in the years after 1945. The left had gained strength during World War II by actually fighting against Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. The United States fought against the left's subsequent bids for political participation and power by any means, including direct warfare in Greece and by massive funding of anti-left parties and politicians throughout Europe. In Greece it supported the far right, including many former collaborators with fascism, and succeeded in putting in place a nasty rightwing authoritarian regime. It continued to support fascist Spain and accepted fascist Portugal as a founding member of NATO, with NATO arms helping Portugal pursue its colonial wars. And the United States, the dominant NATO power, supported rightwing politicians and former Nazis and fascists elsewhere, while of course claiming to be pro-democratic and fighting against totalitarianism.

Perhaps most interesting was the U.S. and NATO support of paramilitary groups and terrorism. In Italy they were aligned with state and rightwing political factions, secret societies (Propaganda Due [P-2]), and paramilitary groups that, with police cooperation, pursued what was called a "Strategy of Tension," in which a series of terrorist actions were carried out that were blamed on the left. The most famous was the August 1980 bombing of the Bologna train station, killing 86. The training and integration into police-CIA-NATO operations of former fascists and fascist collaborators was extraordinary in Italy, but common elsewhere in Europe (for the Italian story, see Herman and Brodhead, "The Italian Context: The Fascist Tradition and the Postwar Rehabilitation of the Right," in *Rise and Fall of the Bulgarian Connection* [New York: Sheridan Square, 1986]. For Germany, see William Blum, on "Germany 1950s," in *Killing Hope* [Common Courage: 1995]).

NATO was also linked to "Operation Gladio," a program organized by the CIA, with collaboration from NATO governments and security establishments, that in a number of European states set up secret cadres and stashed weapons, supposedly preparing for the threatened Soviet invasion, but actually ready for "internal subversion" and available to support rightwing coups. They were used on a number of occasions by rightwing paramilitary groups to carry out terrorist operations (including the Bologna bombing, and many terrorist incidents carried out in Belgium and Germany).

Gladio and NATO plans were also used to combat an "internal threat" in Greece in 1967: namely, the democratic election of a liberal government. In response, the Greek military put into effect a NATO "Plan Prometheus," replacing a democratic order with a torture-prone military dictatorship. Neither NATO nor the Johnson administration objected. Other Gladio forces, from Italy and elsewhere, came to train in Greece during its fascist interlude, to learn how to deal with "internal subversion."

In short, from its inception NATO showed itself to be offensively, not defensively, oriented,

antagonistic to diplomacy and peace, and intertwined with widespread terrorist operations and other forms of political intervention that were undemocratic and actual threats to democracy (and if traceable to the Soviets would have been denounced as brazen subversion).

The Post-Soviet NATO

With the ending of the Soviet Union, and that menacing Warsaw Pact, NATO's theoretical rationale disappeared. But although that rationale was a fraud, for public consumption NATO still needed to redefine its reason for existence, and it also soon took on a larger and more aggressive role. With no need to support Yugoslavia after the Soviet demise, NATO soon collaborated with its U.S. and German members to war on and dismantle that former Western ally, in the process violating the UN Charter's prohibition of cross-border warfare (i.e., aggression).

Amusingly, in the midst of the NATO bombing war against Yugoslavia, in April 1999, NATO held its 50th anniversary in Washington, D.C., celebrating its successes and with characteristic Orwellian rhetoric stated its devotion to international law while in the midst of its ongoing blatant violation of the UN Charter. In fact, the original 1949 NATO founding document had begun by reaffirming its members "faith in the UN Charter," and in Article 1, undertaking, "as set forth in the UN Charter, to settle any international disputes by peaceful means."

The April 1999 session produced a "Strategic Concept" document that laid out a supposedly new program for NATO now that its "mutual defensive" role in preventing a Soviet invasion had ceased to be plausible. ("The Alliance's Strategic Concept," Washington, D.C., April 23, 1999 (<http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/1999/p99-065e.htm>)). The Alliance still stresses "security," though it has "committed itself to essential new activities in the interest of a wider stability." It welcomes new members and new "partnership" arrangements, though why these are necessary in a post-Cold War world with the United States and its closest allies so powerful is never made clear. It admits that "large-scale conventional aggression against the Alliance is highly unlikely," but of course it never mentions the possibility of "large-scale conventional aggression" BY members of the Alliance, and it brags about the NATO role in the Balkans as illustrative of its "commitment of a wider stability." But not only was this Alliance effort a case of legal aggression—"illegal but legitimate" in the Orwellian phrase of key apologists—contrary to this paper, NATO played a major destabilization role in the Balkans, helping start the ethnic warfare and refusing to pursue a diplomatic option in Kosovo in order to be able to attack Yugoslavia in a bombing war that was in process while this document was being handed out. (For a discussion of the NATO role, see Herman and Peterson, "The Dismantling of Yugoslavia," Monthly Review, Oct. 2007: <http://monthlyreview.org/1007herman-peterson1.php>)

"Strategic Concept" also claims to favor arms control, but in fact from its very beginning NATO promoted more armaments, and all the new members like Poland and Bulgaria have been obligated to build up their "inter-operable" arms, meaning getting more arms and buying them from U.S. and other Western suppliers. Since this document was produced in 1999, NATO's leading member, the United States, has more than doubled its military budget and greatly increased arms sales abroad; it has pushed further into space-based military operations; it has withdrawn from the 1972 ABM treaty, refused to ratify the Comprehensive (Nuclear) Test Ban Treaty, and rejected both the Land Mine treaty and UN Agreement to Curb the International Flow of Illicit Small Arms. With NATO's aid it has produced a new arms race, which many U.S. allies and clients, as well as rivals and targets,

have joined.

The 1999 document also claims NATO's support for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, but at the same time it stresses how important nuclear arms are for NATO's power—it therefore rejects a central feature of the NNPT, which involved a promise by the nuclear powers to work to eliminate nuclear weapons. What this means is that NATO is keen only on non-proliferation by its targets, like Iran. Nuclear weapons “make a unique contribution in rendering the risks of aggression against the Alliance incalculable and unacceptable.” But if Iran had such weapons it could make “Alliance” “risks of aggression”—which Alliance member the United States and its partner Israel have threatened—unacceptable. Obviously that would not do.

In its Security segment, Strategic Concept says that it struggles for a security environment “based on the growth of democratic institutions and commitment to the peaceful resolution of disputes, in which no country would be able to intimidate or coerce any other through the threat or use of force.” The hypocrisy here is mind-boggling. The very essence of NATO policy and practice is to threaten the use of force, and U.S. national security policy is now explicit that it plans to maintain a military superiority and prevent any rival power from challenging that superiority in order to hold sway globally—that is, it plans to rule by intimidation.

NATO now claims to threaten nobody, and even talks in Strategic Concept about possible joint “operations” with Russia. Again, the hypocrisy level is great. As we know, there was a U.S. promise made to Gorbachev when he agreed to allow East Germany to join with the West, that NATO would not move “one inch” further East. Clinton and NATO quickly violated this promise, absorbing into NATO all the former Eastern European Soviet satellites as well as the Baltic states. Only self-deceiving fools and/or propagandists would not recognize this as a security threat to Russia, the only power in the area that could even theoretically threaten the NATO members. But Strategic Concept plays dumb, and only threats to its members are recognized.

Although “oppression, ethnic conflict” and the “proliferation of weapons of mass destruction” are alleged great concerns of the new NATO, its relations with Israel are close, and no impediment whatsoever has been (or will be) placed on Israeli oppression, ethnic cleansing, or its semi-acknowledged substantial nuclear arsenal, and of course neither its war on Lebanon in 2006 nor its current murderous attacks on Gaza have impeded warm relations, any more than the US-UK unprovoked attack on Iraq reduced NATO-member solidarity. If Israel is a highly favored U.S. client, it is then by definition free to violate all the high principles mentioned by Strategic Concept. In 2008 NATO and Israel have signed a military pact, so perhaps NATO will soon be helping Israel's “security” operations in Gaza. (In fact, Obama's choice as National Security Adviser, James Jones, has over the past year or so been clamoring for NATO troops to occupy the Gaza Strip and even the West Bank. He is not a lone voice in the U.S. establishment).

The new NATO is a U.S. and imperial pitbull. It is currently helping rearm the world, encouraging the military buildup of the former Baltic and Eastern European Soviet satellites—now U.S. and NATO satellites—working closely with Israel as that NATO partner ethnically cleanses and dispossesses its untermeschen—helping its master establish client states on the Russian southern borders, officially endorsing the U.S. placement of anti-ballistic missiles in Poland, the Czech Republic, Israel, and threateningly elsewhere, at a great distance from the United States, and urging the integration of the U.S. plans with a

broader NATO “shield.” This virtually forces Russia into more aggressive moves and accelerated rearmament (just as NATO did in earlier years).

And of course NATO supports the U.S. occupation of Iraq. NATO secretary-general Scheffer regularly boasts that all 26 NATO states are involved in Operation Iraqi Freedom, inside Iraq or Kuwait. Every single Balkan nation except for Serbia has had troops in Iraq, and now has them in Afghanistan. Half of the former Soviet Commonwealth of Independent States have also provided troops for Iraq, with some of these also in Afghanistan. These are training grounds for breaking in and “inter-operationalizing” the new “partners,” and developing a new mercenary base for the growing “out of area” operations of NATO, as NATO participates more actively in the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

As noted, NATO brags about its role in the Balkans wars, and both this war and the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan have violated the UN Charter. Lawlessness is built-in to the new “strategic concept.” Superceding the earlier (fraudulent) “collective self defense,” the ever-expanding NATO powers give themselves the authority to conduct military campaigns “out-of-area” or so-called “non-Article V” missions beyond NATO territory. As the legal scholar Bruno Simma noted back in 1999, “the message which these voices carry in our context is clear: if it turns out that a Security Council mandate or authorization for future NATO ‘non-Article 5’ missions involving armed force cannot be obtained, NATO must still be able to go ahead with such enforcement. That the Alliance is capable of doing so is being demonstrated in the Kosovo crisis.” (“NATO, the UN and the Use of Force: Legal Aspects,” *European Journal of International Law*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1999, reproduced at <http://www.ejil.org/journal/Vol10/No1/ab1.html>).

The new NATO is pleased to be helping its master project power across the globe. In addition to helping encircle and threaten Russia, it pursues “partnership arrangements” and carries out joint military maneuvers with the so-called Mediterranean Dialogue countries (Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, Mauritania and Algeria). And NATO has also established new partnerships with the Gulf Cooperation Council states (Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates), thereby expanding NATO’s military ambit from the Atlantic coast of Africa to and throughout the Persian Gulf. In the same time frame there has been a unbroken series of NATO visits to and naval exercises with most of these new partners as well as (this past year) the first formal NATO-Israeli bilateral military treaty.

The pitbull is well positioned to help Israel continue its massive law violations, to help the United States and Israel threaten and perhaps attack Iran, and to enlarge its own cooperative program of pacification of distant peoples in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and no doubt elsewhere—all in the alleged interest of peace and that “wider stability” mentioned in Strategic Concept. NATO, like the UN itself, provides a cover of seeming multilateralism for what is a lawless and virtually uncontrolled imperial expansionism. In reality, NATO, as an aggressive global arm of U.S. and other local affiliated imperialisms, poses a serious threat to global peace and security. It is about to celebrate its 60th anniversary, and while it should have been liquidated back in 1991, it has instead expanded, taking on a new and threatening role traced out in its 1999 Strategic Concept and enjoying a frighteningly malignant growth.

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