

# US MEDIA COVERAGE: NATO: Global Police Force Or Hegemonic Interventionist?

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In the “NATO’s Role in Global Politics” interview on the Chicago Tonight episode of April 5 moderator Phil Ponce posed more candid questions that might have been expected from a program that, in its online edition, opens with an ad for the Chicago Council on Global Affairs (formerly the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations) – the broadcast being “possible in part” because of its assistance – with a link to its page Know NATO. Generally he who pays the piper determines the tune, tone, tempo and timbre.

The show’s two guests, Ahmed Rehab, executive director of the Chicago chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, and Joshua Kleinfeld, assistant law professor at Northwestern University, did nonetheless differ in several significant ways in respect to the nature – legal, political and moral – of NATO’s military campaigns of the past 20 years and even perhaps in regard to the military bloc’s post-Cold War role as a whole, with Rehab taking issue with the latest of them (Afghanistan and Libya) and Kleinfeld applauding every pretext for a NATO war ever advanced, however contradictory and mutually exclusive they have been.

But neither took issue with the fundamental fact that the Western military alliance has at times been justified in exacerbating and eventually entering internal conflicts with the use of overwhelming military force those actions inevitably entail.

Rehab, for example, was frank enough to acknowledge NATO actions from Bosnia to Libya as what they were, aggression, but posited a distinction between “evil” aggression and a presumed more benign counterpart.

For Kleinfeld, however, every NATO bomb dropped, missile fired and combat unit parachuted into the Balkans, Afghanistan and Libya is a noble and justified act, the equivalent – his reference – to intervening against Hitler’s Germany in the 1930s and 1940s.

For Rehab, NATO air attacks on behalf of his co-religionists in Bosnia was not a case of evil aggression, though those against fellow Muslims in Afghanistan and Libya were. He seems sharp enough to have realized that an injury to one is an injury to all and that he who conspires with you today may conspire against you tomorrow. A Christian Serb killed by a NATO cruise missile is no less worthy a victim than a Libyan Muslim suffering the same fate.

Furthermore, even during NATO's maiden military campaigns in the Balkans in the 1990s it was apparent to many observers that, having secured control of the remnants of former Yugoslavia, the alliance would extend its trajectory into the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East as well as the South Caucasus and Central Asia. There are historical precedents, after all.

With Kleinfeld, everything NATO does, from conducting an over decade-long war in the Hindu Kush mountain range to establishing a cyber warfare center in Estonia, which borders Russia, is a "defensive" initiative of "28 Western democracies." Without mentioning them, he necessarily includes NATO member states like Albania, Croatia, Estonia and Latvia - the latter two permit Waffen SS veterans to march in their capitals, though that creates no cognitive dissonance for Kleinfeld in regard to invoking the specter of Adolf Hitler to support NATO military interventions - which are in no geographical sense of the word Western and which are guilty of egregious ethnic cleansing, apartheid-style treatment of "non-citizens" and rehabilitation and celebration of World War II Nazi collaborators. But all four new NATO states have troops serving under NATO in Afghanistan, as does Bosnia incidentally.

Rehab correctly questions the subjectivity of NATO armed interventions around the world, though better words would be arbitrary and self-serving, and Kleinfeld conceded, mercifully, that it is "impossible for NATO to intervene everywhere" - (solely?) because of limited resources; cruise missile arsenals, for example, take time and several million dollars to replenish - though expressed no opposition in principle to it doing so. A Washington Post editorial of three days ago calling for NATO intervention in the West African nation of Mali might suggest a delectable prospect for the law professor.

The demand that NATO abide by any standard definition of justification for military intervention is in his view "spurious logical consistency." Comments like that contribute in no small way to the negative image lawyers have in the popular imagination. The word spurious, then, applies to Kleinfeld's assertion itself, as do the words specious and sophistic.

He also asserted - this from a law professor at one of America's most prestigious universities - that the 78-day NATO air war against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999 was "illegal" but "the right thing to do," further expatiating upon acts of military aggression that are in flagrant violation of international and humanitarian law but are "morally justified." Perhaps he should transfer from the law department to that of moral philosophy, though heaven preserve his students should he do so.

Ponce asked if NATO has evolved into the world's police force and described it as interventionist. Rehab described the bloc as pursuing its own interests, motivated by a policy of hegemony.

Never encountering a NATO war he didn't like, Kleinfeld responded that the "international alliance of democracies" was fully justified in pummeling Libya into submission - and detritus - last year, as United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973 "call[ed] for the use of force [and] NATO acted on it."

In fact the resolution, which permanent Security Council members Russia and China and fellow BRIC members Brazil and India abstained on, only called for a no-fly zone and an arms embargo, so it would be intriguing to hear [Kleinfeld explain how it justified much less demanded that the U.S.](#) and British launch 110 cruise missiles into Libya in the opening hours of what immediately became a full-fledged war and NATO fly over 26,000 air missions, among them almost 10,000 strike sorties, against several thousand non-air defense targets on the ground, culminating in bombs from a French multirole combat aircraft and a U.S. Predator drone hitting the convoy of deposed head of state Muammar Gaddafi outside Sirte, thus allowing NATO's allies on the ground to capture, brutalize and murder the almost 70-year-old former leader. In a pinch, the legal scholar could again conjure up the horrors of Nazi Germany and resort to the plea of "moral justification. "

A mindset, a worldview, that permits the unqualified endorsement of unprovoked military aggression by a collective of most of the world's major military powers against small and defenseless counties far from any of its member states' borders is unavoidably accompanied by not so much compromise as capitulation on matters of justice, the non-use of military force, international law and basic bedrock notions of human morality. NATO enthusiasts have become what they have embraced.

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