

## chapter three

# NATO's Real Agenda

(with Silvia Federici)

“The stakes now involve far more than the fate of Kosovo. They were altered dramatically the day the bombing began. It is no exaggeration to say that NATO's failure to prevail would mean both the end of NATO as a credible alliance and the end the undermining of America's global leadership, and the consequences of either would be devastating to global security.”

—Zbigniew Brzezinski

If the justifications given for NATO's war against Yugoslavia lack credibility, what, then, is the real agenda? What is the political meaning of this war, which is now aiming at the country's total destruction?

There many good reasons to ask these questions. First, we have to reckon with the underlying causes of the war, if we are to build an anti-war movement capable of preventing its reoccurrence and/or its expansion, in Yugoslavia or any other part of the world.

Second, as American citizens, we have a special responsibility to understand what drives a war that is waged in our name, paid with our money—at the expense of our neighborhoods and much under-funded public services—and is conducted in violation of our constitution.

Last but not least, with the war in Yugoslavia the US government is leading us on a dangerous path. In addition to undermining our constitutional rights, we must fear that this conflict may not be contained. This is the warning coming to us from many people across the world—Greeks, Italians, Germans, Russians, Chinese—who believe this war is a sign of the US government's determination to dominate the world, and that it renews the danger of a nuclear confrontation with the former Soviet Union.

These fears are not unjustified, if we consider that this war is the last act in a ten-year long intervention by the US and the European Union (EU) (above all Germany and Austria) in what used to be the Yugoslavian Confederation, an intervention that has led to the gradual dismemberment of Yugoslavia, the establishment of a NATO protectorate in Bosnia, and the deployment in it of thousands of US troops for what now appears to be an indefinite time.

Equally important, the war in Yugoslavia is in conformity with the strategic goals the US and EU have set for Eastern and Central Europe since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of “state socialism”—goals that have been repeatedly stated, and already acted upon.

First among them is the enlargement of NATO through its eastward expansion, promoted as a doctrine and a policy by the Clinton Administration since the Brussels Conference of 1994, and already implemented, earlier this year (shortly before the beginning of the attack on Yugoslavia), with the entry of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic into the alliance.

Justified as a response to Russia’s alleged return to “statism” (Kluger 1995)—which means that since 1994 Russia has strengthened ties with the Ukraine and Belarus among other things by supplying them with free oil (Dawisha 1966)—this NATO expansion policy is a momentous reversal in the relationships between the US and Russia. For it reneges on the promises made at the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall, when the reunification of Germany was bargained by the US in exchange for a guarantee that none of the countries of the Warsaw Pact would ever become part of NATO, but would provide instead a buffer zone between Germany and Russia. Indeed, there many policy analysts today who see this move as a serious mistake, threatening world security (Granville 1999).

But the Clinton Administration has insisted that the integration of the countries of Eastern and Central Europe under NATO’s political and military umbrella is the irrevocable condition for European security—indeed its major pillar—and must therefore be a strategic priority for the EU and US (Holbrooke 1995, Granville 1999).

This means that both are now strongly committed to turn the countries of the former Warsaw Pact and the territory of the former Yugoslavia into one continuous capitalist block (adoption of market reforms being a key condition for integration), and are prepared to defend this plan by military force.

Already, from this point of view, we can see that the war in Yugoslavia gives the US and EU the possibility to fulfill two major goals:

(i) It removes one of the last obstacles to NATO's dominance in the Balkans. For the capitulation of Yugoslavia would mark the end of the last Central European country that has opposed NATO's agenda for the region, and resisted the "market reforms" prescribed by the World Bank and the IMF (International Monetary Fund), as a condition for the transition of the former socialist countries to capitalism.

Until the beginning of the war, Yugoslavia still maintained some of the features of the special economic system created during the Tito era, in which major industries were state-owned, factories self-managed, and unemployed workers and farmers received subsidies.

Indeed, in July of 1994 the Serbian National Assembly passed "a law on the revaluation of privatized assets, which effectively halted the whole privatization process." By late 1998, "there was still no law on transformation of ownership, and critics of the Government perceived this to be simply a reflection of delaying tactics on the part of the regime of Slobadan Milosavic." As a consequence, by the late 1990s, "the private sector accounted for only some 15-20% of the business sector." Similarly, the Yugoslavian agricultural sector in the late 1990s still operated according to the system inherited from the Tito period: a combination of large socialized farms and small private ones. (David A. Dyker 1999) The preservation of the socialized economy was "inefficient," and "discredited" according to the IMF, but it obvious was popular enough to elect Milosevic and keep him hanging on to political power (Tim Judah 1998).

Now all of this "is history," as more than two months of relentless bombings have literally pulverized Yugoslavia's industry and economic infrastructure (its factories, roads, railroad lines, bridges, power plants), depriving the Yugoslavian people of any means of survival, and any defense against their now inevitable integration within the "global economy."

(ii) it creates the condition for the militarization of an area that is rich in mineral resources, and very strategically located, being at the cross-roads between Eastern, Central Europe and the Middle East and thus one of the world's most important trade routes (the Danube, which connects Yugoslavia to several Balkan countries, serves the shipping needs of a sizable area of Europe).

However, the full importance of the conquest of Yugoslavia for the US and the EU only emerges when we look at the strategy the US has decided to adopt to forward NATO's eastward advance, and neutralize Russia's attempts to rebuild its ties with the countries of the so-called "Near Abroad."

The lynch-pin of this strategy is the commercial exploitation of the Caspian Sea region. This area, which, we are told, holds some of the world's largest oil fields, has already been the site of huge investment deals; and there is no doubt that whoever controls the wealth to be extracted from it, and the means by which the oil can be transported to the lucrative markets of the west, will also control the politics of the region.

Thus, the Clinton Administration has made it very clear that it is not willing to allow Russia to enjoy this privilege, arguing that control over the transport of the Caspian oil would enable it to further exercise its influence in the region, resist the liberalization of its economy, long promised but not yet actualized, and continue to disappoint the expectations of foreign investors. As Julia Nanay, a consultant to the oil companies of the region, "This is not about oil. It's about defense politics and world strategy. Whether you are talking about containing Russian influence or helping Turkey or containing Iran or building up new states in the region, oil is just a political cover." ("A New Big-Power Race Starts on a Sea of Crude," *New York Times*, 1/24/99)

To pre-empt the possibility that Russia might gain from the Caspian Sea oil, the Clinton administration has decided to embark in a costly project in which political goals often prevail on immediate economic ones. This is the construction of a long pipeline—bringing the oil from Baku on the Caspian Sea to the port of Ceyhan on the Mediterranean in Turkey; that would by-pass the Russian and Iranian system of pipelines, and make the oil-rich republics of central Asia (Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan) independent from Russia.

Oil company executives have complained about the extra costs and political problems the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline will create. "This [skeptical attitude to the pipeline], which is widespread in the oil business, drives American officials to distraction. They are deeply convinced that building a pipeline from Baku to Ceyhan is vital to the US's long-term security interests." ("On Piping Out Caspian Oil, US Insists the Cheaper, Shorter Way Isn't Better," *New York Times*, 11/8/98)

If this strategy is to succeed, however, the Clinton must convince the Russians that NATO is willing to use all its might to discourage any interference with this pipeline, it

must assure the now hesitant leaders of the Central Asian republics that the US will back them up in case of a Russian invasion or subversion; and reassure as well the oil companies' CEO's that the US will protect their multi-billion dollar investments.

Negotiations around these issues have proceeded all through the war and the bombing of civilians in Yugoslavia, which show that the US is not held back by any humanitarian restraint in order to prevail. The bombs and missiles on Belgrade will be a powerful seal on these deals between the Caspian Sea governments and the oil companies.

Whatever else this war may accomplish, in fact, of one thing we can be sure. Not only has Russia been put on the alert that the US is "still the big boy on the block," (in the words of a US diplomat quoted in "A new Big-Power Race Starts on a Sea of Crude," *New York Times*, 1/24/99), but no effort has been spared to demonstrate Russia's irrelevance in international politics, and expose its weakness—a high-risk provocation that in no way can have been unintended.

The image of Primakov first, and later Chernomyrdin, uselessly shuttling back and forth from Moscow to Belgrade, where by a strange coincidence the bombings would intensify on their arrival, is the most eloquent symbol of this Russian defeat, though perhaps not the most humiliating. The US-dominated IMF's concession to Russia, a few days after the beginning of the bombings in Yugoslavia, of a large loan that Russia had long requested but not obtained, being perhaps the most blatant example of the US's will to demean Russia and diminish its image in the eyes of the world ("Russian Anger Over Attack Tempered by Need for Cash." *New York Times*, March 25, '99).

There are other advantages the US and EU can draw from this war. Among them is the consolidation of the US's leadership in European affairs, at one point seemingly threatened by the prospect of Europe's political and monetary union. With this new military intervention in Yugoslavia (after that in Bosnia) the US can again position itself as a "European power" (Holbrooke 1995), the main architect of the new European world order, together with a once again powerful Germany eager to reshape the East as its economic backyard.

The humiliation of Russia, in fact, goes hand in hand with the relaunching of the US-EU alliance, which, for all the trade rivalries of which we have heard so much about in recent months, still has many common grounds, all being played out in the war.

The German-led EU needs the US military might if it wants to pry open the economies of the East to its exports and already substantial capital investments, and

to have access to the newly discovered oil bonanza. A force of 150,000 NATO troops is also a reassuring presence for European governments at time when many are warning that the monetary union (to be implemented at the end of this year) "is an unprecedented high risk gamble" (Ash 58) that, sooner or later, it will face a crisis (*Ibid.* 60), and it may tear Europe apart, socially and politically.

For poor countries will be hard pressed to cut all social entitlements to keep up with fiscal and monetary requirements that have been set by Germany and therefore are shaped by the needs of Europe's most powerful economy (Singer 1996; Ash 1998, Martin and Ross 1999). Already, all EU governments are waging an assault on their countries' pension systems—that now will have to be sacrificed to pay for the war in Yugoslavia.

Indeed, we may find out that the bombs dropped on Yugoslavia are meant to explode also in Europe and the US, if the philosophy recently expressed by the Wall Street Journal—"we would rather pay for bombs than for the Social Security Trust Fund"—does express the spirit of the day. ("From Pentagon to Triangle," *Wall Street Journal* editorial, 5/17/99).

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