

What is NATO Doing in Afghanistan?

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What is NATO doing in Afghanistan? What are the true aims of NATO intervention in the region? These are the questions that I mean to address in this article. To understand what is happening in Afghanistan one has to go back to the attack on Yugoslavia by NATO forces in February 1999.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, NATO lost its *raison d'être* given that Western Europe and the United States were no longer threatened by an invasion from Eastern Europe. NATO thus had the choice between disbanding itself or developing a new reason for its existence. This gave the opportunity to the United States to reshape NATO in ways that would serve its imperial interests. It is very important to remember that its founding documents clearly say that NATO was a defensive organisation, which would go into action only when one of its member states was attacked.

The first step in the US strategy of changing the nature of NATO was the attack on Yugoslavia on the pretext of preventing ethnic cleansing. Clearly Yugoslavia had not attacked a NATO member state thus excluding a response from NATO. Whatever one can say about Kosovo, it was internationally recognised as an integral part of Yugoslavia (and is still internationally recognised as part of Serbia) and Yugoslavia did not attack or even threaten a NATO member state.

As was clear right from the beginning of the Kosovo crisis in the 90s, and as was confirmed at the NATO 50th Anniversary Celebrations in Washington in April 1999, one of the aims of the United States in attacking Yugoslavia at that time on the pretext of preventing ethnic cleansing in Kosovo was to present to the European states a *fait accompli* as an example of the future role of NATO as an offensive organisation whose aim was to act as the world's policeman, or more rightly thug, in the defence of perceived United States interests. It was clear that the US was intent on provoking a war with Yugoslavia and its subsequent bombardment.

How was this achieved? One of the final steps in the American strategy in attacking a sovereign state, Yugoslavia, which had not attacked any NATO member state, was the proposed Rambouillet Accords, February 23 1999. These show clearly that the Americans had no intention of pursuing a peaceful settlement of the Kosovo problem and that they intended to push Milosevic into a situation that he could not accept. In the words of Lamberto Dini, the then Italian Foreign Minister, the Rambouillet Accords were made deliberately to "humiliate the Serbs" so that they could not accept them.

Here I reproduce some of the worst points of the proposed Rambouillet Accords, Appendix B: Status of Multi-National Military Implementation Force:

3. The Parties recognize the need for expeditious departure and entry procedures for NATO personnel. Such personnel shall be exempt from passport and visa regulations and the registration requirements applicable to aliens. At all entry and exit points to/from the FRY (Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, F.H.), NATO personnel shall be permitted to

enter/exit the FRY on production of a national identification (ID) card. NATO personnel shall carry identification which they may be requested to produce for the authorities in the FRY, but operations, training, and movement shall not be allowed to be impeded or delayed by such requests.

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6. a. NATO shall be immune from all legal process, whether civil, administrative, or criminal.

b. NATO personnel, under all circumstances and at all times, shall be immune from the Parties, jurisdiction in respect of any civil, administrative, criminal, or disciplinary offenses (sic) which may be committed by them in the FRY. The Parties shall assist States participating in the operation in the exercise of their jurisdiction over their own nationals.

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7. NATO personnel shall be immune from any form of arrest, investigation, or detention by the authorities in the FRY. NATO personnel erroneously arrested or detained shall immediately be turned over to NATO authorities.

8. NATO personnel shall enjoy, together with their vehicles, vessels, aircraft, and equipment, free and unrestricted passage and unimpeded access throughout the FRY including associated airspace and territorial waters. This shall include, but not be limited to, the right of bivouac, maneuver (sic), billet, and utilization of any areas or facilities as required for support, training, and operations.

9. NATO shall be exempt from duties, taxes, and other charges and inspections and custom regulations including providing inventories or other routine customs documentation, for personnel, vehicles, vessels, aircraft, equipment, supplies, and provisions entering, exiting, or transiting the territory of the FRY in support of the Operation.

15. The Parties recognize that the use of communications channels is necessary for the Operation. NATO shall be allowed to operate its own internal mail services. The Parties shall, upon simple request, grant all telecommunications services, including broadcast services, needed for the Operation, as determined by NATO. This shall include the right to utilize such means and services as required to assure full ability to communicate, and the right to use all of the electromagnetic spectrum for this purpose, free of cost. In implementing this right, NATO shall make every reasonable effort to coordinate with and take into account the needs and requirements of appropriate authorities in the FRY.

17. NATO and NATO personnel shall be immune from claims of any sort which arise out of activities in pursuance of the operation; however, NATO will entertain claims on an ex gratia basis.

21. In carrying out its authorities under this Chapter, NATO is authorized to detain individuals and, as quickly as possible, turn them over to appropriate officials.

I have here only given some of the articles of the infamous Appendix. The others are more of the same ilk. The whole appendix is worth reading. These are some of the privileges which are for example enjoyed by US troops in Italy. (The new secret agreements being proposed between the US government and the Maliki puppet government in Iraq go much further). It was clear that the Rambouillet Accords were attacks on the sovereignty of Yugoslavia and that NATO wanted to completely take over Yugoslavia. The above conditions were obviously entirely unacceptable to a sovereign state and it was clear that these conditions were put so that Milosevic could not accept them and that the bombing of Serbia could start. In fact that is exactly what happened.

It should be clear and there is ample evidence of this, which I cannot reproduce here without making this article too long, that the attack on Yugoslavia had absolutely nothing to do with preventing ethnic cleansing and all to do with punishing a state that did not accept US diktat and was a crucial step towards reinventing the role of NATO.

Attentive readers in Pakistan will note the uncanny similarities between the proposed Rambouillet Accords of 1999 preceding the 78 day NATO bombardment of Yugoslavia and what Shirin Mazari, a Pakistani defence analyst and former head of the Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI), revealed as a set of demands that the USA recently made to the Pakistan government (The News March 8, 2008). Although one can never be sure, I hope that the Musharraf government at that time and the present government have rejected these demands which negate Pakistani sovereignty. I wonder if the new "democratic" dispensation has given in to US pressure to remove Ms. Mazari from her position as head of the ISSI given her opposition to NATO presence in Afghanistan and her criticisms of US policy in the region.

It is relevant to point out that although the Serbian Parliament had agreed to an accord a day before the bombardment was started, this was deliberately ignored. Also significant is the fact that the final accord sanctioning Yugoslav withdrawal from Kosovo after 78 days of bombing achieved much less than what was being pushed in the Rambouillet Accords. So what was the point of bombardment if much less was acceptable? It was clear then and it is clearer now that the main idea was to change the nature of NATO as part of a broader strategy to dominate the Eastern Mediterranean and the oil routes from Central Asia.

The aim of reinventing the role of NATO into an aggressive arm of US foreign policy was achieved at the Washington meeting. The birth of the new NATO was sanctioned by the following words of the 19 heads of state and government on 24th April 1999:

This new alliance will be bigger, more capable and more flexible, involved in collective defence and capable of undertaking new missions, among which is the active commitment in the management of crises, including the operations of responding to crises. (Washington Summit Communiqué, 24/4/1999)

The newly born creature is the fruit of an operation of genetic engineering: from an alliance that, on the basis of Article 5 of the Treaty of 4 April 1949, authorised its member countries to assist (also with armed force) any member state that was attacked in the North Atlantic area, was transformed into an alliance that, on the basis of the new "strategic concept", commits the member countries also to conduct operations outside the territory of the Alliance (non-Article 5 operations). This was

stressed several times in the document "The Alliance's Strategic Concept" approved by the Heads of State and government on April 24, 1999. For example in Article 31 it says

NATO will seek, in co-operation with other organisations, to prevent conflict, or should a crisis arise, to contribute to its effective management, consistent with international law, including through the possibility of conducting non-Article 5 crisis response operations. (The Alliance's Strategic Concept, 24/4/1999; Defence Capabilities Initiative, 24/4/1999)

Remove the fig leaf of respect for international law and here you have the real intentions of NATO, to conduct operations throughout the world as it pleases.

To remove any doubt about the intentions of NATO, President Clinton clarified, during the press conference on 24 April 1999, that the North Atlantic Allies

have reaffirmed their readiness to affront, in appropriate circumstances, regional conflicts beyond the territory of the members of NATO. (Transcript: Clinton Says NATO May Intervene Beyond Its Borders, 24/4/1999)

To the question on what was the geographical area in which NATO was ready to intervene, "the President refused to specify to what distance NATO intended to project its force, saying that it was not a question of geography". In other words, NATO intended to project its military force beyond its borders not only in Europe, but also in other regions, like the Middle East, Africa and the Indian Ocean. NATO gave itself the right to intervene anywhere in the world whenever it feels its interests are threatened, without consulting the United Nations. Led by the biggest and most dangerous rogue state, the United States, NATO was set to become the gravest threat to peace throughout the world. One of the amazing and disgusting spectacles to watch in Europe in those days was that these so-called democracies accepted the new NATO without discussion in any of the European Parliaments. It is as if loyalty to NATO (which means in effect obedience to US diktat) has been put above all other considerations of national sovereignty and democracy. The Italian Prime Minister at that time, Massimo D'Alema, an ex-communist, said that Italy had to go to war because of its commitments and loyalty to NATO. He perhaps forgot that the principle of obeying orders while committing acts against humanity was not accepted at the Nuremberg trials as an attenuating circumstance.

It is worth remembering in these times, when one tends to blame Bush and his gang for all US aggressive imperialist policies, that all the above took place under the falsely admired Clinton and his Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, famous for her remark that the death of 500,000 Iraqi children as a consequence of the then embargo on Iraq was a justified price to pay to remove Saddam. We tend to forget that all US presidents follow such policies. As was obvious Bush and his gang whole-heartedly accepted the new role of NATO. In fact this was reemphasised in the recent NATO heads of states meeting in Romania where Bush explicitly said that the role of NATO was that of a "global expeditionary force". These are terrible words that bode ill for the future of the world.

Yugoslavia of course could not and did not accept the demands made in the Rambouillet Accords and was therefore subject to savage bombing. The bombing of Serbia sanctioned NATO out of area operations and was a prelude to NATO involvement in Afghanistan as the handmaiden of the USA. NATO should never have been in Afghanistan in the first place and it is good to see that many European countries are reluctant to send their troops to die there. What is happening in Afghanistan is tragic with hundreds of innocents dying at the hands of indiscriminate bombing by US and NATO forces and by the retaliatory Taliban and resistance bombings but one thing is clear and that is that NATO will lose the war in Afghanistan. This is good because, I hope, that it will lead NATO to rethink its role in the post-cold war world and perhaps, if we are lucky, it may even be disbanded in the

future. A NATO victory in Afghanistan will be disastrous for the region and for the world. It will encourage it in its Bush-designated role of a global "expeditionary alliance". At the NATO summit in Bucharest in April Bush said about NATO: "It is now an expeditionary alliance that is sending its forces across the world to help secure a future of freedom and peace for millions." In other words to interfere in and invade other poor countries of the south with the pretext of the new white man's burden: promoting freedom and peace. The people of Iraq and Afghanistan have enough of this so-called freedom and peace. It is therefore necessary that NATO loses in Afghanistan.

A total withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan followed by a negotiated settlement between Afghan forces is the only way forward there. There are those who say that the withdrawal of NATO forces will lead to chaos, more deaths and re-talibanisation of Afghanistan. But the truth is that the presence of foreign troops is one of the major factors of violence there. What more chaos and destruction can there be in Afghanistan? All the touted aims of the USA and NATO are dead. There is no democracy there, Karzai is a US puppet, the warlords are in power and the level of insecurity is increasing, car bombs are becoming a norm. Pushtuns, as other peoples, never tolerate foreign occupation of their soil and to me it seems clear that the Taliban have mobilised Pushtun national sentiment in combating foreign troops.

Following the failure of NATO to defeat Afghan insurgents, the US blames Pakistan for providing sanctuary and training camps for Taliban and Al-Qaeda in the border region of Pakistan. But we have heard this before. When they cannot control the insurgency in Iraq they blame Iran or Syria for providing training and weapons to Iraqi insurgents. But this is an even older story. Those with a long memory will remember that when the US could not defeat the Vietnamese revolutionaries they said that there were training camps and sanctuaries in neighbouring Laos and Cambodia. One remembers the savage bombing of Cambodia from 1969 to 1973. It did not help the US to defeat the Vietnamese nationalists but led to over a 100,000 Cambodian deaths to add to the 3 million Vietnamese killed during the war. Now they are bombing so-called Al-Qaeda and Taliban in Waziristan on dubious "actionable intelligence" in which hundreds of innocents are killed and this without a word of protest, if not connivance, on the part of our elected representatives.

It is a good sign that, in spite of continued US pressure, one of the first tasks that the new government in Islamabad has undertaken is a review of Pakistan's involvement in America's "war on terror". An involvement that has already caused death and destruction in the frontier, disillusionment in the army and suicide bombings in major cities. There are reports of secret deals, made in January, between the USA and Musharraf's government providing Predator bases inside Pakistan and changing rules of engagement of these aircraft whose controllers are now authorised to fire on suspicion rather than "hard" intelligence. One would like to know from the elected government whether there were such secret deals and if there were does it intend to repudiate them. Already the CIA and the FBI operate freely inside Pakistan and the Americans are demanding that we now accept ground troops in the guise of trainers for the Army and militia. They want to teach the Pakistan Army about counterinsurgency. If it were not so ominous it would be really quite hilarious given the singular failure of the US army in fighting guerrillas in Vietnam and now in Iraq and Afghanistan. What methods are they going to teach the Pakistan Army? Massive bombing and collective punishment in the best traditions of Vietnam?

Although the present government has taken some timid steps in distancing itself from the so-called "war on terror" and has rightly started to talk to the people of Waziristan, it has not gone far enough. It has to clearly tell the USA that its policies in Afghanistan and in Pakistan's frontier are a failure. They have only led to death, destruction and the spread of terrorism. The only way out is for all foreign forces to get out of Afghanistan and for the US to stop interference in Pakistan. Once these forces are out of the region then and only then will one be able to come to a political solution,

as there is no purely military solution neither to the problems of Afghanistan nor to the rising phenomena of Islamic militancy in Pakistan. Pushtuns have clearly voted against the mullahs and the militants but at the same time the rejection of Musharraf is also a sign that the people of Pakistan reject Pakistan's forced marriage with the disastrous US policies in the region. It is time for a clean divorce.

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