

The NATO War Against Yugoslavia and The Twilight of the European Project

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In the midst of the bombing campaign it is impossible for us to grasp the full significance of the NATO war against Yugoslavia. This is particularly true for those of us living in NATOland since the war, for us, is purely synthetic experience, television images as part of our daily, normal routine and images which are themselves increasingly routinised and thus normal. Indeed for us the whole war is part of our everyday routine: yesterday it was Iraq, some newsflashes about Sudan and somebody with an exotic name in Afghanistan, today Kosovo, tomorrow Taiwan – all far away places which we naturally care deeply about but about which we know little and need to know less.

But one of the significant consequences of the NATO attack on Yugoslavia is almost certainly that it marks the end of the European project as a political project for Western and Central Europe. That political project could only have succeed if the member states of the European Union had been prepared to stick to their words and reconstruct the European political order as a norm-based rather than a power-politics based system, becoming democratic and embracing the Eastern part of the continent. This war seems certain to bring that effort to an end. A gathering of intellectuals at the Marc-Bloc Foundation in Paris on 29th May, entitled 'After the Emotion the Political Reflection' began to tackle this question seriously. Claude Lanzmann, the producer of *Shoah*, the documentary account of the Holocaust spoke. He said that the NATO attack on Yugoslavia was a new Dreyfus Affair. It is, but this time with a whole European nation, the Serbs, cast in the role of Dreyfus. A handful of French intellectuals sensed quickly that the whole case against Dreyfus was constructed out of lies. Millions upon millions of people across Europe now see the Serb nation for what it is: a victim of the power plays of Western powers which have constructed this war on a foundation of lies, shattering the entire normative scaffolding upon which the new Europe was supposed to be built. Powerful States can and so wage wars rooted in fictions and falsehoods, and get away with it. But attempts to build transnational, post-nation state structures like the European Union, the Council of Europe or the OSCE on a power politics that displays contempt for the supposedly founding principles of such bodies are unlikely to be sustainable.

The continuation of the European project as a form of political development for Europe will be possible only if one of two conditions are met: either the NATO Dreyfus affair in the Western Balkans can be quickly forgotten in a rapid move to prosperity, peace and hope in a reconstructed Western Balkans; or the political and intellectual resources of Europe are mobilised to decisively repudiate the entire aggressive war against Serbia and against a tolerable future for all the peoples in that region. Neither of these two conditions seems a remote possibility. As a result, the European project is likely to become a Single Market project, harmonised with the requirements of American business

plus a currency under American tutelage. And the tendency will be for the main West European powers to be constantly involved in power politics manoeuvres on an American led agenda, manoeuvres focused largely on mounting chaos in the Eastern and South Eastern part of the continent.

The NATO attack on Yugoslavia was the result of American diplomacy, just as the war itself is essentially an American war legitimated by the fact that it is run as a NATO war. For many months during 1998, the West European powers did try to resist the American drive for a NATO war. Their resistance was partly based upon the fact that their strategic interests differed from those of the Americans but the form of their resistance was that of attempting to resolve the conflict in Yugoslavia by mediation and by peaceful means. But in late January, 1999 the British and the French governments broke ranks and lined up behind the Clinton Administration for war.

Thus to understand the current war we have to understand the character of American aims. There are broadly speaking two approaches to this question. One approach says that the Clinton Administration was reacting to events in the Western Balkans in deciding to go for war. Its aims were governed by the plight of the Kosovar Albanians. This line of argument then leads to the conclusion that there was an extraordinary mismatch between US aims and US methods, a mismatch which the European pundits supporting the war explain by reference to supposed American stupidity. We will survey the diplomatic background and the launch of the war to explore the validity of this theory which we will call the Theory of American Stupidity. In doing so we will show how the approaches of the US and the West Europeans to the Kosovo issue in the run-up to war were not complementary: they were directly contradictory. The US approach undermined European efforts at mediation and peaceful resolution of the conflict. The West European approaches constantly undermined the US drive for war, until the Franco-British turn in January 1999.

Those who support the war need to address this conflict of approaches in order to provide themselves with a consistent position. They can say that the European approach was complicit with the Serbian government; or they can say that the US approach was responsible for much of the terrible sufferings of the Kosovo Albanians both before the NATO attack and especially after it had begun. But they should not evade these issues.

But there is a second way of understanding US aims in launching this war. This says that the Clinton Administration's drive for war was dictated by US strategic political aims in Europe and in the international arena and thus that a war against Yugoslavia over Kosovo was simply an instrument in US geopolitical strategy: the Kosovo Albanians' plight was a pretext and the Kosovar Albanian political groups were simply pawns. This view is, of course, anathema to the media pundits in NAToland, but it is overwhelmingly popular in the foreign offices and state executives of the states of Europe and of the entire world. On this view, the war demonstrates one central lesson: the inability of the main West European powers to sustain a collective political will in the face of unrelenting US pressure. Thus, despite the very strong political and economic interests of the main West European capitalist states in maintaining a collective stance in the face of US manoeuvres over European affairs, their rivalries and vanities can always ultimately be exploited by the US to divide them. In essence this gives us a theory of the current war in terms of the West European states' stupidities. We will examine that theory, which we will call the Theory of European Stupidity.

Of course, the word 'stupidity' is a polite one, it is a neutral, problem-solving word, without significant ethical connotations. It is necessary, perhaps to add that the word is used here in an ironical sense. The moral and political consequences of this war for Europe are terrible to contemplate. The hopes of a better future for the continent 10 years ago are over. Never glad confident morning in Europe again, at least not for decades. The next phase of European history will be marked by the efforts of the United States to push further its drive for global hegemony in Europe and elsewhere. As soon as it has finished its bombing campaign in the Western Balkans it will switch

its pitiless gaze East towards the coming truly awesome confrontation with China. Back and forth between Asia and Europe the US will move, attempting to beat the world into shape for the next millennium. The really strong arguments for the NATO war are actually the general arguments for US global hegemony. These take two forms. First, those who actually believe that US hegemony will produce a new world of global citizens rights, global prosperity and global justice. Secondly, the pragmatists argue that we cannot buck the trend, we must bandwagon with the hegemon in order to subvert it later from within its secure security zone. That subversion will take the form of transforming hegemonic dominance into a cosmopolitan set of institutions of global governance and justice. We will survey those arguments at the end of this article.

PART 1: THE THEORY OF AMERICAN STUPIDITY

The notion of American stupidity is really a British idea. It has been a double-sided notion throughout the post-war period in Britain: on one side it is a variety of Anti-Americanism much beloved in the British upper classes (especially those on the Right); on the other side it is a message of hope – perhaps we can be cleverer than the Americans and manipulate them to our advantage. Thus have the British upper classes reconciled themselves to being constantly managed – often for the benefit of the world's populations, as in the case of Suez – by successive American administrations in an uninterrupted progress of British decline. The notion of American Stupidity is now becoming a European idea during the course of the present war. It has become the absolutely central conceptual mechanism for overcoming the contradictions in the efforts to justify the NATO air war against Yugoslavia.

These contradictions derive from one single source: the attempt to explain the origins of the NATO attack as lying in a reactive effort to respond to the plight of the Kosovar Albanians. The contradictions disappear if we explain the attack as an attempt involve the European NATO members in a war to destroy the existing Serbian state. But that latter explanation raises a great many new questions about this war which NATO governments are seeking, so far very successfully, to evade.

The distinction between seeking to help the Kosovar Albanians and seeking to destroy the existing Serbian state may seem a fine one. Common sense may suggest that the two goals are simply two sides of a single coin: supporting one side in a local conflict against the other side. But the NATO attack on Yugoslavia has involved much more than support for one side against another. It has entailed a decision by NATO to overthrow the normative cornerstones of the post-war international order: the principle of state sovereignty and the outlawing of aggression against a state without UN Security Council mandate. To take that step, the NATO powers could not simply claim that they were opposed to the domestic policies of the Yugoslav state. They had to claim that they were taking drastic action to save the Kosovo Albanians from a genocidal catastrophe. More, they had to claim that nothing other than military aggression against Serbia could prevent the catastrophe because all other methods had been tried and had failed.

From this stance come all the contradictions in the NATO position. For during the 14 months up to the launch of the NATO war, the West European and Russian governments were in continuous conflict with the USA over Kosovo, the USA systematically tried to sabotage a peaceful settlement of the conflict in Yugoslavia and the way in which the Clinton Administration launched the war invited a genocidal slaughter of the Kosovo Albanians.

The European variant says that for 14 months the 'International Community' tried every possible means of resolving the conflict peacefully. All efforts were thwarted by the Yugoslav authorities. So

there was no choice but to turn to US air power. The US variant claims that for 14 months the US was struggling to gain agreement to a war against Yugoslavia, but the Europeans and Russians were blocking war. But finally, the US managed to push the Russians out of the picture (along with the UN) and bounce the West Europeans into a just war that they had been resisting.

These two variants may not appear incompatible, but a glance at that 14 month history shows that they were, because the failure of the European-Russian efforts to gain a negotiated solution was the direct result of the activities of the US State Department. Only for a brief moment at the very start of the current phase of the Kosovo crisis did the USA appear to be on the same line as the Europeans, in viewing the KLA as a terrorist group. To search for the real origins of the war we need to survey this history.

1. The US both encouraged the Serbian government to launch the counter-insurgency and wanted war against the Serbian government because of its counter-insurgency. From early March 1998, Albright wanted war against Serbia on the grounds that the Serbian government was genocidal. On March 7th, 1998, just after and in response to the Serbian security force operation in the Benitsar region of Kosovo, she declared: "We are not going to stand by and watch the Serbian authorities do in Kosovo what they can no longer get away with doing in Bosnia." Two days later she reserved the right for the US to take unilateral action against the Serbian government, saying, 'We know what we need to know to believe we are seeing ethnic cleansing all over again.' This remained the US line right the way through from that first Serbian counter-insurgency drive against the KLA in Benitsar: Albright demanded war against Serbia. But the signal for the Serbian government to launch its counter-insurgency in Benistar also, intriguingly, came from Albright's own State Department. This signal was given by the United States special envoy to the region, Ambassador Gelbard. The BBC correspondent in Belgrade reported that Gelbard flew into Belgrade to brand the KLA as a terrorist group.

' "I know a terrorist when I see one and these men are terrorists," he said...At the time, the KLA was believed to number just a several hundred armed men. Mr. Gelbard's words were interpreted in the Yugoslav capital, Belgrade, as a green light for a security forces operation against the KLA and the special police conducted two raids in the Benitsar region in March.'

So the Clinton administration encouraged the Serbian counter-insurgency in order to liberate the Kosovo Albanians from it through a NATO war. The Europeans on the other hand, wanted the Serbian counter-offensive against the KLA to result in an internationally brokered a compromise peace granting Kosovo Autonomy within Serbia.

2. The 'international community' tried for 14 months to broker a peaceful solution, but the Clinton Administration did not. The UN (in its resolution 1199), the West European powers and the Russians sought, during 1998, to bring about a cease fire and a negotiated solution in Kosovo, granting autonomy to the Albanians within Serbia. The Serbian government, from March 1998 declared its support for this, and there was support for this approach, as an interim solution, from the Rugova shadow government in Pristina. Only two major actors opposed this: Madeleine Albright and the KLA. Albright and the whole Clinton administration gave massive political support to the KLA, undermining the line of the other members of the Contact Group and the line of UN resolution 1199.

Support for the KLA did not involve support for its aims: the Clinton administration has always opposed the aims of both the KLA and the Rugova leadership, both of whom demand independence for Kosovo. The Clinton administration did, however, support the KLA's means - guerrilla warfare against the Serbian state - by repeatedly and vigorously making demands upon the Serbian government which strengthened and encouraged the KLA war.

This US support for the KLA became unequivocal by June 1998, by which time NATO military planning for an attack on Yugoslavia was completed. In that month, White House spokesperson Mike McCurry asserted that Serbia 'must immediately withdraw security units involved in civilian repression, without linkage to...the 'stopping of terrorist activity.' In parallel, Pentagon spokesperson Kenneth Bacon said: 'We don't think that there should be any linkage between an immediate withdrawal of forces by the Yugoslavs on the one hand, and stopping terrorist activities, on the other. There ought to be complete withdrawal of military forces so that negotiations can begin.' In other words, Washington was insisting that before any cease-fire or negotiations on a Kosovo peace settlement, the Serbian authorities must withdraw all their forces for Kosovo, handing over the territory to the KLA's military forces despite the fact that the urban Albanian population of Kosovo was far more pro-Rugova than the KLA. As Gary Dempsey explains, the US was demanding that the Serbian government 'effectively hand over one of its territories to an insurgency movement.....This...led many ethnic Albanians to further conclude that the Clinton administration - despite its official statements to the contrary - backed their goal of independence....Although US policy was officially opposed to independence for Kosovo, Washington would not allow Belgrade to forcibly resist it.'

Air War supporters thus have a choice of interpretations on these matters: either the US was right to back the KLA and sharpen the internal conflict in preparation for a NATO attack, in which case the Europeans and the Russians were presumably covert supporters of the dictatorial, genocidal Milosevic regime. Alternatively, they can argue that the European-Russians-UN were right to seek an internal cease-fire and negotiated solution and the US was wrong to try to sabotage this. But Air War supporters cannot embrace both variants.

3. Sabotaging the October 13th Cease-Fire:

On 13th October, Albright's rival in the Clinton administration, Richard Holbrooke, negotiated a cease-fire agreement with Yugoslav President Milosevic. The cease-fire would be monitored in Kosovo by OSCE observers. Milosevic agreed on the basis that the US administration would ensure that the KLA did observe the cease-fire.

But the Clinton administration sabotaged the whole operation. The OSCE monitors did not enter Kosovo for a whole month after the agreement. During that time, the KLA did not respect the cease-fire, continued its operations and extended its reach in Kosovo. During the delay, the Clinton administration took control of the OSCE, placed William Walker, a key organiser of the Contra operation in Nicaragua and the blood-bath in El Salvador, in charge of the OSCE monitoring force. Some 2,000 trained monitors waiting in Bosnia to be sent into Kosovo were blocked by the US, who put US ex-military personnel in as the monitoring force and from mid-November they surveyed every bridge, cross-roads, official building, security force billet and barracks - every item that could be relevant to a future NATO-KLA joint offensive.

At the same time the European-Russian-UN line continued to be to seek an internal solution and blamed the KLA for the failure to achieve it. Thus, for example, at their General Affairs Council on 8th December, 1998, Cook and the other foreign ministers of the EU assessed the situation in Kosovo. The report of the meeting in the Agence Europe Bulletin of the following day stated: 'At the close of its debate on the situation in the Western Balkans, the General Affairs Council mainly expressed concern for the recent 'intensification of military action' in Kosovo, noting that 'increased activity by the KLA has prompted an increased presence of Serbian security forces in the region.' ' Thus, the EU saw the KLA as the driving force undermining the possibility of a cease fire and a compromise solution. They were simply on a different line from Albright. And they continued to be right through January.

4. Turning the Rambouillet Negotiations into an Ultimatum, while overthrowing the Rugova Leadership:

The two variants continue into the Rambouillet process. The idea of bringing the two sides together into face to face negotiations under international auspices came from the French government. The Clinton administration had been against such an idea, favouring a straight move towards bombing. But on this occasion, the differences were overcome in favour of the French getting their way on the form while the US would get its way on the substance. This was a turning point. The French and British switched over to the US position at a meeting of the contact group in London on 29th January, 1999, exactly a week before the opening on 6th February of the Rambouillet 'negotiations'. From that moment on the NATO attack on Yugoslavia was a virtual certainty. We can see why when we appreciate that the Rambouillet 'negotiations' were not negotiations at all: they were an ultimatum to the Serbian government which was drafted in such a way as to ensure that it would be rejected.

The Serbian government wanted face to face negotiations at Rambouillet with the Kosovo representatives. This the Americans absolutely refused, presumably with British and French support since they were formally supposed to be in charge of the process. It is also fairly clear that there were some on the Kosovo side who were interested in discussing with the Serbian authorities. Why else would the Clinton administration have decided to overthrow the elected Rugova government of Kosovo and replace it with a KLA-led government, there and then, at Rambouillet?

The Serbian side was then required to agree to the 'Agreement' without changing it, or face NATO attack on Yugoslavia. If the Serbian government had signed the 'Agreement' the agreement would have had no status in international law, since treaties signed under threat of aggression have no force in international law. But the Serbian authorities, probably wisely, did not have any confidence in their ability to rely upon international law, so they refused to sign.

Most people assume that the Serbian government refused to sign, because the 'Agreement' would lead to the independence of Kosovo. The 'Agreement' did involve a de facto NATO Protectorate (not, by the way, a democratic entity. The Chief of the Implementation Force could dictate to the Kosovo government on any aspect of policy he considered relevant to NATO (i.e. US) concerns.)

But the real sticking point for the Serbian government seems to have been the threat that the 'Agreement' posed to the rest of Yugoslavia. The NATO compliance force would have complete control of Kosovo deploying there whatever types of forces it wished: 'NATO will establish and deploy a force (hereinafter KFOR) which may be composed of ground, air, and maritime units from NATO and non-NATO nations, operating under the authority and subject to the direction and the political control of the North Atlantic Council (NAC) through the NATO chain of command. The Parties agree to facilitate the deployment and operations of this force.' Thus, if the US wished to use Kosovo as a base for the invasion and occupation of the rest of Yugoslavia it could do so.

This was threat enough. But the so-called 'Appendix B' added to the document at Rambouillet itself and kept secret until it was leaked and eventually published in the French press, insisted that NATO forces could move at will across the whole of Yugoslavia. Thus: '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, manoeuvre, billet, and utilisation of any areas or facilities as required for support, training, and operations.' NATO could also alter the infrastructure of Yugoslavia at will: 'NATO may.... have need to make improvements or modifications to certain infrastructures in the FRY, such as roads, bridges, tunnels, buildings, and utility systems.' It could thus move around investigating all Yugoslav infrastructures with a view to destroying them (in an attack) later. And the Yugoslav authorities 'shall provide, free of cost, such public facilities as

NATO shall require.' The Yugoslav authorities '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 utilise such means and services as required to assure full ability to communicate....free of cost.' 'NATO is granted the use of airports, roads, rails, and ports without payment of fees, duties, dues, tolls, or charges occasioned by mere use.' The Yugoslav authorities must not merely tolerate this: they must facilitate it:' The authorities in the FRY shall facilitate, on a priority basis and with all appropriate means, all movement of personnel, vehicles, vessels, aircraft, equipment, or supplies, through or in the airspace, ports, airports, or roads used. No charges may be assessed against NATO for air navigation, landing, or takeoff of aircraft, whether government-owned or chartered. Similarly, no duties, dues, tolls or charges may be assessed against NATO ships, whether government-owned or chartered, for the mere entry and exit of ports.'

And in all such activities in the whole of Yugoslavia, NATO shall be completely above the law: 'NATO shall be immune from all legal process, whether civil, administrative, or criminal.' And again: '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 offences which may be committed by them in the FRY. ' And again: ' NATO and NATO personnel shall be immune from claims of any sort which arise out of activities in pursuance of the operation'.

This threat to move from Kosovo to the overthrow of the entire Serbian and Yugoslav regime was underlined by the fact that NATO claimed the right to dictate the fundamentals of socio-economic policy within Kosovo, with the Yugoslav and Kosovo governments completely under the diktat of US policies. Thus: 'The economy of Kosovo shall function in accordance with free market principles.' And: 'There shall be no impediments to the free movement of persons, goods, services, and capital to and from Kosovo.' And again: 'Federal and other authorities shall within their respective powers and responsibilities ensure the free movement of persons, goods, services, and capital to Kosovo, including from international sources. There must also be complete compliance with the IMF and World Bank. Thus: 'International assistance, with the exception of humanitarian aid, will be subject to full compliance with....conditionalities defined in advance by the donors and the absorptive capacity of Kosovo.' The Yugoslav government must also agree to handing over economic assets to foreign interests. Thus: 'If expressly required by an international donor or lender, international contracts for reconstruction projects shall be concluded by the authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.'

These statements made it perfectly clear that NATO was out to destroy the existing character of the Serbian economy. The ultimatum also demonstrated that NATO was determined to wage war against the Serbian media. It demanded 'Free media, effectively accessible to registered political parties and candidates, and available to voters throughout Kosovo.' And it said that 'The IM shall have its own broadcast frequencies for radio and television programming in Kosovo. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia shall provide all necessary facilities.....'

Rambouillet was thus an ultimatum for a war against Serbia and the terms of the ultimatum demonstrated that if the Serbian government accepted Rambouillet they would very likely face a crushing attack in the future from NATO forces on Yugoslav soil.

5. The Launch of the War and the Need for Stupidity

With the 'failure' of Rambouillet, the Clinton Administration took open charge of the preparations for war. And it is at this point that the analysis of those who support the NATO Air War faces absolutely irreconcilable contradictions. For the way in which the war was launched is, on the face of it, absolutely inexplicable.

The bombing campaign was launched in 24th March. But President Clinton announced on the 19th of March that the bombing campaign would be launched and nothing now could block it. The US administration thus gave the Serbian government 5 days in which they could do as their pleased in Kosovo. And when the bombing started, it was organised so that the Serbian authorities could continue to have a free hand in Kosovo for more than a week. The air war's first phase was directed largely at targets outside the Kosovo theatre itself for a full week.

And this military side of the attack was combined with an absolutely contradictory set of explanations for NATO's aggression. On one side, the attack was justified as an attempt to prevent the genocidal threat to the Kosovar Albanians from the Milosevic regime. But on the other side, the attack was simultaneously justified by the claim that the Milosevic regime had no such genocidal intentions and indeed wanted the bombing campaign in order to use it to sell Rambouillet to the Serbian people.

These contradictions cannot be explained away by haste, improvisation and confusion on the part of the Clinton administration. We know that the US National Security Council and the State Department had been planning this war in detail for 14 months before it started. We know also from the Washington Post that the experts in the US administration spent those 14 months running over, day after day, all the variants of the course of such a war, all the scenarios of possible Yugoslav government responses to the air attack. We know that they foresaw the possibilities of mass refugee exits from Kosovo. The Pentagon foresaw a long air war: the notion that Milosevic wanted the bombing attack was political spin put about by General Wesley Clark: it was nonsense. So why did they plan the start of the war in this particular way?

There is only one serious explanation: the Clinton Administration was giving the Serbian authorities the opportunity to provide the NATO attack with an ex post facto legitimisation. The US was hoping that the five days before the launch of the bombing and the first week of the war would give various forces in Serbia the opportunity for atrocities that could then be used to legitimate the air war.

This was a rational calculation on the part of the US planners. They knew that the main political opponents in Serbia of Milosevic's Socialist Party – the Radical Party of Seselj and various Serbian fascist groups – supported the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo, though the Socialist Party did not. They knew also that Yugoslav military forces would pour into positions in Kosovo as the OSCE personnel left, clearing strategic villages, driving forward against KLA-US supporters. They could predict also that there would be a refugee flow across the borders into Macedonia and Albania.

And the US planners were proved right. Extremist Serbian groups did, it seems, go on the rampage in Pristina for three days after the start of the war. Refugees did start to flood across the borders. And the resulting news pictures did indeed swing European public opinion behind the war. As for the Serbian government organising a genocidal mass slaughter, this did not happen: the Clinton administration organised the launch of the war to invited the Serbian authorities to launch a genocide, but the Milosevic government declined the invitation.

It is simply impossible to argue that the US military campaign was designed to stop the brutalities against the Kosovo Albanians. It would be far easier to demonstrate that this thoroughly planned and prepared war was designed to increase the chances of such brutalities being escalated to qualitatively higher levels. The way that the war was launched was designed to increase the sufferings of the Kosovar Albanians in order to justify an open-ended US bombing campaign against the Serbian state. The technique worked. But this success cannot be acknowledged. Instead it must be hidden by the notion of Clinton administration stupidity.

And to this stupidity the European pundits of NATO can add many other supposed American

stupidities. The stupidity of trying to save the Kosovar Albanians with an air war instead of a ground war. The stupidity of killing so many Albanian and Serbian civilians. The stupidity of not swiftly admitting such killings when they occur.

And then there is the most fascinating stupidity of all: the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade. This particular stupidity must have been a defining moment for the European powers, a moment for hard, focused thinking, for one very simple reason: stupid or not, the governments of Western Europe know that it was not a mistake. They know that the US military attaches in Belgrade had dined more than once at the Chinese Embassy compound in the city before the war started. They know very well how prominent the compound is and how professional the US intelligence operation for targeting is. They know that the Embassy was hit on a special mission by a plane from the United States. And they noted Clinton's casual response: no press conference to make a formal public apology. Just an aside about an unfortunate mistake in a speech about something else. They know too that China is by far the most important issue in the entire current US foreign policy agenda.

And the West European states have learned more about the stupidity of the bombing of the Chinese Embassy since it has occurred: it resulted in the collapse of weeks of German-Russian diplomacy which had gone into producing the G8 declaration agreed just before the Embassy was bombed. That G8 declaration threatened to undermine the US's 5 conditions for ending the war and threatened to rebuild the central authority of the UN over NATO: the Embassy bombing put a stop to all that. More, it completely sabotaged Schroeder's planned business visit to China: West European efforts to steal contracts with China by taking a softer line than the Clinton administration were brought to a standstill and the West Europeans are being brigaded into line behind Washington's policy in a new confrontation with China.

All this, for the West Europeans is surely the height of stupidity. But pennies have been dropping in the Chancelleries of Western Europe. They are realising that even if there has been plenty of stupidity in the NATO war against Yugoslavia, the stupidity may not lie in Washington. It may lie in quite a different quarter, namely in the state executives of Western Europe itself. To see why, we need an entirely different take on the origins of the NATO attack on Yugoslavia.

PART 2: THE THEORY OF EUROPEAN STUPIDITY

The alternative take on the origins of the NATO war against Yugoslavia starts from the fact that the war did not derive from big power reactions to local events in the Balkans at all. Instead, this theory starts from the premise that the Clinton administration was seeking a war against Yugoslavia as a means for achieving political goals outside the Balkans altogether. The conflict between the Serbian state and the Kosovar Albanians was to be exploited as a means to achieve US strategic goals outside the Balkans on the international plane.

This conception turns the cognitive map used by the proponents of American stupidity on its head. Thus, for example, instead of thinking that the US was ready to overthrow the norms of the international order for the sake of the Kosovar Albanians, we assume exactly the opposite: the US was wanting to overthrow the principles of state sovereignty and the authority of the UN Security Council and used the Kosovo crisis as an instrument for doing so. Instead of imagining that the US was ready to shut Russia out of European politics for the sake of the Kosovar Albanians, we assume that the Clinton administration used the NATO attack on Yugoslavia precisely as an instrument for consolidating Russia's exclusion. Instead of assuming that the US was ready to abandon its policy of engagement with China for the sake of the Kosovo Albanians, we assume that the Clinton

administration used the war against Yugoslavia to inaugurate a new phase of its policy towards China. And last but not least, instead of assuming that the US firmly subordinated the West European states to its military and political leadership in order create a new dawn in the Western Balkans, it used a number of ingenious devices – especially the dilettantish vanity of messieurs Chirac and Jospin – to drag the West European states into a Balkan war that would consolidate US hegemony over them, the EU and the Euro's development.

This is where the European stupidity enters the theory. **The one strategic interest of the main West European states** (Germany and France) in the Balkans lies in maintaining stable and strong enough states in the region to keep their impoverished populations firmly in place. West European military intervention in the Balkans has essentially been concerned with preventing mass migrations Westwards when states collapse. Anglo-French military involvement in Yugoslavia through UNPROFOR was essentially about that: 'humanitarian aid' in the war zone to ensure that the civilian population did not leave the war theatre. Italian military intervention in Albania in 1997 was about the same thing: stanching the flood of humanity out of Albania Westwards, by rebuilding an Albanian state while blocking emigration and asylum rights. Anglo-French efforts in Macedonia and Albania in the current war are similarly about caging the Kosovar Albanians within the Western Balkans. Yet now the American air force has, with European support, turned the Western Balkans into twenty years (minimum) of chaos from which all the energetic younger generations of all ethnic groups will rightly wish to flee West for decades to come. This is the first European stupidity.

The second strategic interest of the West European states (especially Germany) in Eastern Europe is to maintain stable, friendly governments in Russia and Ukraine. That too can be ruled out as a result of this war as far as Russia is concerned; Ukraine will have to choose between Russia and the USA (the EU is not a serious alternative. And both Russia and Ukraine could spiral out of control with disastrous consequences for Central Europe Western Europe. This is the second European stupidity.

The third strategic interest of the main West European states has been to combine an effort to bandwagon with US power with preserving an effective check on US efforts to impose its will on their foreign policies, whether in Europe or other parts of the world. That too seems finished now. The basic West European check on US power was the French veto at the UN Security Council, restraining the US with its 2 votes (including that of the UK). Now that Chirac has chosen to discredit the UN Security Council, he has undermined his own ability to speak for Europe at the UNSC and to be a useful partner for other states seeking to gain European help to restrain the US. That is a third stupidity.

A fourth West European priority was to be able to claim that the EU is an independent, West European political entity with a dominant say at least over European affairs. Yet the current war demonstrates that this is a piece of pretentious bluff: the EU has played absolutely no role whatever in the launching or the management of this war. It will play no role whatever in the ending of the war. It is simply a subordinate policy instrument in the hands of a transatlantic organisation, the North Atlantic Council, handling the economic statecraft side of NATO's policy implementation. And within the North Atlantic Council the United States rules: the way the war ends will shape the future of Europe for at least a decade, yet that decision will be taken in the White House: the West European states (not to speak of the EU institutions) are political voyeurs with their noses pressed against the windows of the Oval Office trying to read the lips of the people in there deciding Europe's fate. This is a fourth stupidity.

To explain the background to these stupidities we must examine US strategy since the collapse of the Soviet Bloc.

US GLOBAL STRATEGY IN THE 1990S

In some conditions the cognitive framework – local actions, big power reactions – is useful. Such conditions exist when the superpower is satisfied and secure that the structures which it has established to ensure its dominance are safely in place. It is sitting astride the oceans comfortably and it reacts now and again to little local blow-outs and break downs.

Some might regard that as being the situation of the United States after the collapse of the Soviet Bloc. If we look at the power of the United States in the 1990s in resource terms, it has had no rival or even potential group of rivals in the military field, it dominates the international political economy, there is no power on earth remotely able for the foreseeable future to challenge the United States for world leadership.

Yet curiously enough, the United States has been far from satisfied with its situation in the 1990s. It has felt itself to be facing a number of important challenges in the two key traditional regions of the world where it must exercise leadership – Europe and the Pacific Rim – and the challenges there are linked to another big challenge: the battle to ensure the preponderant weight of US capitalism in the so-called 'emerging markets'. Leadership of Europe and of the Pacific in turn ensure that the United States can channel the activities of these states to ensure that US interests predominate in designing regimes to open up and dominate the 'emerging markets'.

These problems were all connected to another, deeper issue: concerns about the basic strength and dynamism of the American economy and American capitalism. When the Clinton administration came into office it was determined to rejuvenate the dynamism of American capitalism through an activist foreign drive to build a new global set of political economy regimes accented to the strengths and interests of American capitalist expansion. Getting leverage over the Europeans and Japanese to achieve that was key.

To understand US policy in the 1990s, we must appreciate the double-sided situation that it found itself in: on one side, its old way of dominating its capitalist 'allies' had been shattered by the Soviet Bloc collapse, giving lots of scope for these 'allies' to threaten important US interests in their particular regional spheres. But on the other side, the US had gigantic resources, especially in the military-political field and if it could develop an effective political strategy it could convert these military power resources into a global imperial project of historically unprecedented scope and solidity. We must grasp both the challenges and the great opportunities after the Soviet Bloc collapse to understand the strategy and tactics of the Bush and Clinton administrations.

(a) The Post-Cold War Problems

The challenge to the US in Europe created by the collapse of the Soviet Bloc has too often been ignored. That collapse not only made the USA the sole global super-power. It also simultaneously destroyed the political structures through which the USA had exercised its direct leadership over West European capitalism. And it simultaneously opened the whole of Eastern Europe for business with the West, a business and political expansion opportunity which the West European states, especially Germany, would spontaneously tend to control. What if West European capitalist states threw off US leadership, forged their own collective military-political identity, joined their capitals with Russian resources and Russian nuclear capacity? Where would that leave the USA in Western Eurasia outside of Turkey?

The central political pillar of US leadership over Western Europe during the Cold War was NATO. The US-Soviet confrontation positioned Western Europe on the front line in the event of a US-Soviet war. This situation enable the USA to gain political leadership over Western Europe by supplying the

military services – the strategic nuclear arsenal – to protect Western Europe. In return for these military services, the West European states agreed to the US politically brigading them under US leadership. The US could exercise control over their foreign policy apparatuses, integrating the bulk of their military forces under US command, imposing discipline of the dealings of West European capitalism with the East and so on. And the US could also exercise this political leadership for economic purposes, especially to assure the free entry of US capitals into Europe, to ensure that Europe worked with the US over the management of the global economy etc. So NATO was a key military- political structure. The hierarchy was: US military services give political leadership which gives leadership on the big economic issues, those to do with the direction of accumulation strategies.

But the Soviet collapse led to the redundancy of the US strategic arsenal which led to the redundancy of NATO, the collapse of the political leadership structure for the US in Europe and the undermining of the US's ability to impose its core political economy goals for Europe and for the world on the West Europeans. This is one of the key things that has made the United States a paradoxically dissatisfied power in the 1990s. It has had to combat all kinds of European schemes for building political structures that deny the US hegemonic leadership in Europe. And in combating such schemes it has had to develop a new European programme and strategy for rebuilding US European leadership. In short, the USA has been an activist and pro-active power in Europe during the 1990s, not a satisfied and reactive power. The 1990s have been a period of political manoeuvres amongst the Atlantic capitalist powers as the key players have sought to advance their often competitive schemes for reorganising the political structures of the continent.

And in these manoeuvres, the territory and peoples of the former Yugoslavia have played a very special role. The states bearing competing programmes for a new European political order have all sought to demonstrate the value of their political project for Europe by showing how it can handle an important European problem: the long Yugoslav crises. Yugoslavia has been the anvil on which the competing great powers have sought to forge the instruments for their new European orders. No power has been more active in these endeavours than the United States.

And this means that a cognitive framework for understanding the Balkan wars cannot take the form of local actions, great power reactions. We need an entirely different framework: great power European strategies, and the tactical uses of Yugoslavia's crisis for advancing them.

(b) The New Opportunities.

Yet the United States was not just a power dissatisfied with the international arrangements it confronted at the end of the Cold War. It was also aware that it had a gigantic relative lead over all other powers in the world in terms of the resources for entirely reshaping arrangements on the planet. It had not only unrivalled military capacity but command of new military technologies that could enable it to strike safely and fairly accurately at will anywhere on the planet. It could, for example, out of a clear blue sky, destroy the great dam on the Yangtse river and drown 100 million Chinese at the heart of the Chinese economy without the Chinese government being able to stop it: that kind of power. It could take on China and Russia together and win. It could militarily seal off Japan and Western Europe from their sources of vital inputs for their economies and from the export markets vital for their economic stability.

The United States also have supreme command over the international political economy through the dominance of the Dollar-Wall Street Regime over international monetary and financial affairs and through US control over the key multilateral organisations in this field, especially the IMF and the World Bank.

With resources like these, the collapse of the Soviet Bloc opened up the possibility of a new global Empire of a new type. An empire made up of the patchwork of the states of the entire planet. The legal sovereignty of all these states would be preserved but the political significance of that legal sovereignty would be turned on its head. It would mean that the state concerned would bear entire juridical and political responsibility for all the problems on its territory but would lose effective control over the central actual economic and political processes flowing in and out of its territories. The empire would be centred in Washington with Western Europe and Japan as brigaded client powers and would extend across the rest of the world, beating against the borders of an enfeebled Russia and a potentially beleaguered China.

And it would be an Empire in which the capitalist classes of every state within it would be guaranteed security against any social challenge, through the protection of the new Behemoth, provided only that they respected the will and authority of the Behemoth on all questions which it considered important. If the US played its new strategy for empire building effectively, it could thus earn the support and even adulation of all the capitalist classes of the world.

Thus the decade from 1989 to 1999 has been marked above all by one central process: the drive by the US to get from (a) to (b): from political structures left over from the Cold War which disadvantaged and even threatened the US in the new situation, to entirely new global political and economic structures which would produce an historically new, global political order: New Democrats, New Labour, New NATO, new state system, new world economy, new world order. This is the context in which we can understand the various Yugoslav wars, including the current one.

P.S.

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