

Kosovo:

Did NATO really act out of Humanitarian Concerns?



By Anup Shah

The NATO bombings were justified on the grounds of "humanitarian" concerns. Other false assumptions and even what could be considered as hypocritical arguments were used to justify the necessity of the aggression (this last link has a good account on the legal ramifications of the crisis given NATO's illegal actions, as well as a look into the humanitarian actions, thus suggesting some hypocrisy). Yet, the mainstream media accepted this without much analysis, or scrutiny.

Double standards seem to be apparent again. There are many other regions around the world where even hundreds of thousands of people have been killed or displaced yet we see passivity from the US there, but not here. (I mention the US here as they are the most influential country and have had the ability to similarly "intervene" in other countries where similar atrocities are being committed - even if it is a country seen as an ally, like Indonesia, Turkey, pre-1990 Iraq, etc.)

There are numerous countries that have been involved in, or contributed to, similar, or even worse atrocities. In some nations these violations are still occurring, or have occurred in the recent past. However, most of these have been largely, perhaps even hypocritically, ignored compared to the Kosovo crisis, while also presenting a strong case for "humanitarian intervention". They include:

- Algeria
- Chechnya/Russia
- Colombia,
- Democratic Republic of Congo
- Ethiopia
- India/Pakistan
- Indonesia/East Timor
- Israel
- Rwanda
- Spain/Basque Region
- Tibet/China
- Turkey
- United Kingdom/Northern Ireland
- United States

While Serbia was being bombed by NATO there was not much support of the fleeing refugees in Kosovo. The destruction of civilian infrastructure by NATO bombing, which violated international law was also not humanitarian. (Just a few months later, worse atrocities were taking place, in East Timor. Yet, none of the rhetoric about a new order and a new humanitarian

cause has been invoked by the major leaders. Even in NATO member Turkey's own land, terrible atrocities still occur without any intense complaints from other NATO members.)

So what would the message be to all those nations who are cracking down in some way their own people or neighbors? That they will face NATO attacks and bombardment? Probably not. Perhaps something more like, if they step out of line with US/NATO interests, then they will face bombardment and destruction, otherwise they can continue as normal because US/NATO do not care what they do in their own back yard.

Shortly after the Kosovo crisis ended, the Clinton Administration came out with the "Clinton doctrine". This doctrine basically stated that the United States would forcefully intervene to prevent human rights abuses when it can do so without suffering substantial casualties, without the authority of the UN Security Council.

"Tony Blair is a young man I like very much," Mr Mandela said. "But I am resentful about the type of thing that America and Britain are doing. They want now to be the policemen of the world and I'm sorry that Britain has joined the US in this regard. It's a totally wrong attitude. They must persuade those countries like China or Russia who threaten to veto their decisions at the UN. They must sit down and talk to them. They can't just ignore them and start their own actions."

"Mandela accuses 'policeman' Britain", in an interview with the Guardian, April 5, 2000.

This is a pretty serious precedent for a powerful country to set as it in effect undermines international law and treaty obligations. The US has in the past been extremely selective in the determination of where humanitarian intervention (or even just concern) is needed. Allies of the US have often been gross human rights violators, but those abuses have been conveniently ignored by the US to be able to pursue its national interests (i.e. economic liberalization of other nations, ensuring resources that the US needs remain as cheap as practically possible and so on). In some regions, the US continues to provide arms to allies that use them to commit gross violations of human rights (and that in effect, helps the US pursue its national interests. After all, why else would they knowingly support human rights violators?).

"Without the authority of the UN Security Council" basically implies another step to undermine the UN. It should be noted that the UN does have its flaws which need to be addressed (for example, the U.N. Security Council, plus the idea of 5 permanent (nuclear) members of the Council, is not exactly very democratic). However, it also is the main international body set up to promote universal human rights.

The US was key in helping set it up shortly after the second World War. Various UN treaties and charters, one of which is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which the US has signed, form parts of international law which all member states are bound to. So, to "prevent human rights abuses" by by-passing the United Nations suggests that the definition of human rights which the US wishes to uphold is different to what they helped create and sign. It also suggests that the US has other motives when it will choose to intervene.