

How Long Will Europe Put Up With a Crazy America?

BY GABRIEL KOLKO

Troops to Afghanistan are a secondary issue to the much more important question of the “ambitious agenda”, as recently outlined by the U.S. ambassador to NATO, Victoria Nuland, a former Cheney aide, in an interview in the January 24 *Financial Times*. The U.S.A. wants a “globally deployable military force” that will operate everywhere – from Africa to the Middle East and beyond. It will include Japan and Australia as well as the NATO nations. To quote Nuland “It’s a totally different animal”, whose ultimate role will be subject to U.S. desires and adventures. NATO must have a “...common collective deployment at strategic distances”.

Nuland’s statements reflect Washington’s realization after its chronic troop shortage in Iraq and elsewhere that Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld’s vision of “shocking and awing” enemies has been spectacularly unsuccessful and that the U.S.A. needs foreign manpower more desperately than ever. Its global visions – and illusions – cannot be attained without them. Hence its renewed emphasis on NATO and mobilizing foreign troops. Washington now favors a rapprochement with “old Europe” and the nations it dismissed after September 11, 2001. It wants to build a “strategic consensus” and to expand NATO’s role notwithstanding its resolution after the 1999 war in the former Yugoslavia to never again allow NATO’s consensual voting procedures to constrain American actions – as, indeed, it has not.

Its belief in the sufficiency of “coalitions of the willing” has proven to be a chimera. In this regard, the Bush administration now tacitly admits that its view after 2001 that it could pursue its global role alone was a colossal failure. Hence the fierce pressure from Washington on the Netherlands to send troops to Afghanistan.

The official Munich conference on security policy in early February – which Rumsfeld attended – reflected the American desire to transform NATO so it will again be a useful weapon in its quiver of military choices – particularly its manpower. This is

all the more essential because Rumsfeld’s plans for reforming the entire military will lead to a 20 per cent reduction of maneuver battalions in favor of larger headquarters and more high-tech weapons, and men on the ground will be scarcer than ever. The U.S.A. wants the NATO states to spend more on their military forces, thereby relieving the U.S.A. from increasing its already huge budget deficit.

The Bush administration’s ambitions for NATO are based on more ideological neo-con fantasies, which must not be encouraged. The same American leaders have ignored their own intelligence to pursue ambitions which have traumatized Afghanistan and the Middle East, and today threaten the peace elsewhere. If the schemes for NATO outlined by Nuland gain the support of European states then the U.S. is likely to commit more follies to fulfill its illusions, and hence create further miseries.

American objectives – beyond fighting a war on “terror” – are inherently indefinable as to length and location but certain to be very ambitious. Fear is the glue that creates alliances and keeps them together, and the fear of communism and the U.S.S.R. that led to NATO’s creation has been replaced by the fear of Muslim fundamentalism, terrorism, and the like. But just as the dangers of communism proved illusory, so too will American forebodings of terror prove to be vacuous. The problem is what the U.S.A. will do before its allies grow tired of its paranoid politics. It has already said it wants NATO to send more troops to Kosovo so that it can ship 1,700 American soldiers there to Iraq. The Netherlands has agreed to its demand on sending forces to Afghanistan but all NATO members have to prepare for more troop requests in the future as part of Washington’s goals everywhere. That is the central issue that the NATO members must now confront.

The NATO contingents now in Afghanistan will not succeed where the Americans have already failed after four years in building a state no longer controlled by warlords, drug lords, and various Islamic

fundamentalists. They will be shot at and killed, and the publics of the NATO states will become increasingly anti-war and vote out of office those who have obeyed American demands.

They have already done so in Spain, they may do the same in Italy, and while Washington may win in the short run, ultimately there is a very good chance that its successes will produce a crisis in NATO – and perhaps the end of this artifact of the Cold War.

In a word, we are at the beginning, not the end, of a crisis in the U.S. relations with NATO members. European nations may now articulate a political identity that is both in their national interests and conforms to their values – the very thing that the U.S.A. hoped NATO would prevent from occurring when it created it over a half-century ago. The Bush administration may very well compel them to become more independent. That is to be welcomed. CP

Gabriel Kolko’s new book, The Age of War, will be published in March.

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He's "Hitler", He "Hates Jews", He's ... Hugo Chavez, Of Course.

A Bulletin from *Extra*

It began with an alert from the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles (1/4/06) accusing Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez of invoking an anti-Semitic slur. In a Christmas Eve speech, the Center claimed, Chavez declared that "the world has wealth for all, but some minorities, the descendants of the same people that crucified Christ, have taken over all the wealth of the world."

The Voice of America (1/5/06) covered the charge immediately. Then opinion journals on the right took up the issue. "On Christmas Eve, Venezuela's President Hugo Chávez's Christian-socialist cant drifted into anti-Semitism," wrote the Daily Standard, the Weekly Standard's Web-only edition. The American Spectator was so excited about the quote, which it called "the standard populist hatemongering of Latin America's new left leaders," that it presented it as coming from two different speeches.

Then more mainstream outlets began to pick up the story. "Chavez lambasted Jews (in a televised Christmas Eve speech, no less) as 'descendants of those who crucified Christ' and 'a minority [who] took the world's riches for themselves,'" the New York Daily News' Lloyd Grove reported. A column in the Los Angeles Times used the quote to label Chavez "a jerk and a friend of tyranny." The Wall Street Journal's "Americas" columnist, Mary Anastasia O'Grady, called Chavez's

words "an ugly anti-Semitic swipe."

But the criticisms of Chavez almost uniformly used selective, even deceptive editing to remove material that put his words in a different context. Here's a translation of the full passage from Chavez's speech:

"The world has an offer for everybody but it turned out that a few minorities—the descendants of those who crucified Christ, the descendants of those who expelled Bolivar from here and also those who in a certain way crucified him in Santa Marta, there in Colombia—they took possession of the riches of the world, a minority took possession of the planet's gold, the silver, the minerals, the water, the good lands, the oil, and they have concentrated all the riches in the hands of a few; less than 10 percent of the world population owns more than half of the riches of the world."

Most of the accounts attacking Chavez (the Daily Standard was an exception) left the reference to Bolivar out entirely; the Wiesenthal Center deleted that clause from the speech without even offering an ellipsis, which is tantamount to fabrication.

As Rabbi Arthur Waskow further pointed out, in the Gospel accounts, "it was the Roman Empire, and Roman soldiers, who crucified Jesus." While it's true that anti-Semites often accuse Jews of killing Jesus, it's ludicrous to assert that anyone who refers to the crucifixion of Jesus is attacking the Jewish people.

That Chavez's comments were part of some anti-Semitic campaign is directly contradicted by a letter sent by the Confederation of Jewish Associations of Venezuela to the Wiesenthal Center. "We believe the president was not talking about Jews," the letter stated, complaining that "you have acted on your own, without consulting us, on issues that you don't know or understand." The American Jewish Committee and the American Jewish Congress agreed with the Venezuelan group's view that Chavez was not referring to Jews in his speech.

In context, the Chavez speech seems to be an attempt to link the attacks on his populist government to the attacks on his two oft-cited heroes, Jesus and Bolivar; the "minority" that would link the two would be the rich and powerful minority of society.

Jim Lobe of Inter Press Service pointed out the irony of conservative outlets like the Wall Street Journal and the Daily Standard, edited by William Kristol, promoting dubious accusations of anti-Semitism in Latin America:

"Kristol's father, Irving Kristol, and the Journal's editorial page to which he contributed, led a public campaign to discredit Argentine publisher Jacobo Timerman when he emerged in 1980 from two-and-a-half years of imprisonment in secret prisons in Argentina claiming that Jews like himself had been systematically singled out for the worst treatment and torture by a military regime whose ideology was as close to Nazism as any since World War II." CP

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