

NATO in US Grand Strategy

Diana Johnstone

Diana Johnstone is the author of Fools Crusade: Yugoslavia, NATO and Western Delusions (Pluto Press, £17.99) and, with Jean Bricmont, of Humanitarian Imperialism: Using Human Rights to Sell War (Monthly Review Press, £15.95).

On 19 and 20 November 2010, NATO leaders met in Lisbon for what was billed as a summit on 'NATO's Strategic Concept'. Among topics of discussion was an array of scary 'threats', from cyber-war to climate change, as well as nice protective things such as nuclear weapons and a high-tech, Maginot Line boondoggle supposed to stop enemy missiles in mid-air. The NATO leaders were unable to avoid talking about the war in Afghanistan, that endless crusade which unites the civilized world against the elusive Old Man of the Mountain, Hassan i Sabah, eleventh century chief of the Assassins, in his latest reincarnation as Osama bin Laden. There will, no doubt, be much talk of 'our shared values'.

Most of what they discussed is fiction with a price tag. The one thing missing from the Strategic Concept summit agenda was a serious discussion of strategy. This is partly because NATO, as such, has no strategy, and cannot have its own strategy. NATO is, in reality, an instrument of United States' strategy. Its only operative Strategic Concept is the one put into practice by the United States. But even that is an elusive phantom. American leaders seem to prefer striking postures, 'showing resolve', to defining strategies.

One who does presume to define strategy is Zbigniew Brzezinski, godfather of the Afghan Mujahideen back when they could be used to destroy the Soviet Union. Brzezinski was not shy about bluntly stating the strategic objective of US policy in his 1993 book *The Grand Chessboard*: 'American primacy'. As for NATO, he described it as one of the institutions serving to perpetuate American

hegemony, 'making the United States a key participant even in intra-European affairs'. In its 'global web of specialized institutions', which of course includes NATO, the United States exercises power through 'continuous bargaining, dialogue, diffusion, and quest for formal consensus, even though that power originates ultimately from a single source, namely, Washington, DC'.

The description perfectly fits the Lisbon 'Strategic Concept' conference. Before the conference, NATO's Danish secretary general, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, announced that 'we are pretty close to a consensus'. And this consensus, according to the *New York Times*, 'will probably follow President Barack Obama's own formulation: to work toward a non-nuclear world while maintaining a nuclear deterrent'.

Wait a minute, does that make sense? No, but it is the stuff of NATO consensus. Peace through war, nuclear disarmament through nuclear armament, and above all, defense of member states by sending expeditionary forces to infuriate the natives of distant lands.

A strategy is not a consensus written by committees.

The American method of 'continuous bargaining, dialogue, diffusion, and quest for formal consensus' wears down whatever resistance may occasionally appear. Thus, Germany and France initially resisted Georgian membership in NATO, as well as the notorious 'missile shield', both seen as blatant provocations, apt to set off a new arms race with Russia, and damage fruitful German and French relations with Moscow, for no useful purpose. But the United States does not take 'no' for an answer, and keeps repeating its imperatives until resistance fades. The one recent exception was the French refusal to join the invasion of Iraq, but the angry US reaction scared the conservative French political class into supporting the pro-American Nicolas Sarkozy.

In search of 'threats' and 'challenges'

The very heart of what passes for a 'strategic concept' was first declared and put into operation in the spring of 1999, when NATO defied international law, the United Nations and its own original charter by waging an aggressive war outside its defensive perimeter against Yugoslavia. That transformed NATO from a defensive to an offensive alliance. Ten years later, the godmother of that war, Madeleine Albright, was picked to chair the 'group of experts' that spent several months holding seminars, consultations and meetings preparing the Lisbon agenda. Prominent in these gatherings were Lord Peter Levene, chairman of Lloyd's of London, the insurance giant, and the former chief executive

of Royal Dutch Shell, Jeroen van der Veer. These ruling class figures are not exactly military strategists, but their participation should reassure the international business community that their worldwide interests are being taken into consideration.

Indeed, a catalogue of threats enumerated by Rasmussen in a speech last year seemed to suggest that NATO was working for the insurance industry. NATO, he said, was needed to deal with piracy, cyber security, climate change, extreme weather events such as catastrophic storms and flooding, rising sea levels, large-scale population movement into inhabited areas, sometimes across borders, water shortages, droughts, decreasing food production, global warming, CO₂ emissions, the retreat of Arctic ice uncovering hitherto inaccessible resources, fuel efficiency and dependence on foreign sources, etc.

Most of the enumerated threats cannot even remotely be construed as calling for military solutions. Surely no ‘rogue states’ or ‘outposts of tyranny’ or ‘international terrorists’ are responsible for climate change, yet Rasmussen presents them as challenges to NATO. On the other hand, some of the results of these scenarios, such as population movements caused by rising sea levels or drought, can indeed be seen as potentially causing crises. The ominous aspect of the enumeration is precisely that all such problems are eagerly snatched up by NATO as requiring military solutions. The main threat to NATO is its own obsolescence. And the search for a ‘strategic concept’ is the search for pretexts to keep it going.

NATO’s threat to the world

While it searches for threats, NATO itself is a growing threat to the world. The basic threat is its contribution to strengthening the US-led tendency to abandon diplomacy and negotiations in favour of military force. This is seen clearly in Rasmussen’s inclusion of weather phenomena in his list of threats to NATO, when they should, instead, be problems for international diplomacy and negotiations. The growing danger is that Western diplomacy is dying. The United States has set the tone: we are virtuous, we have the power, the rest of the world must obey or else.

Diplomacy is despised as weakness. The State Department has long since ceased to be at the core of US foreign policy. With its vast network of military bases the world over, as well as military attachés in embassies and countless missions to client countries, the Pentagon is incomparably more powerful and influential in the world than the State Department.

Recent Secretaries of State, far from seeking diplomatic alternatives to war, have actually played a leading role in advocating war instead of

diplomacy, whether Madeleine Albright in the Balkans or Colin Powell waving fake test tubes in the United Nations Security Council. Policy is defined by the National Security Advisor, various privately-funded think tanks, and the Pentagon, with interference from a Congress which itself is composed of politicians eager to obtain military contracts for their constituencies.

NATO is dragging Washington's European allies down the same path. Just as the Pentagon has replaced the State Department, NATO itself is being used by the United States as a potential substitute for the United Nations. The 1999 'Kosovo war' was a first major step in that direction. Sarkozy's France, after rejoining the NATO joint command, is gutting the traditionally skilled French foreign service, cutting back on civilian representation throughout the world. The European Union foreign service, now being created by Lady Ashton, will have no policy and no authority of its own.

Bureaucratic inertia

Behind its appeals to 'common values', NATO is driven, above all, by bureaucratic inertia. The alliance itself is an excrescence of the US military-industrial complex. For sixty years, military procurements and Pentagon contracts have been an essential source of industrial research, profits, jobs, Congressional careers, even university funding. The interplay of these varied interests converge to determine an implicit US strategy of world conquest:

- An ever-expanding global network of somewhere between 800 and a thousand military bases on foreign soil;
- Bilateral military accords with client states which offer training while obliging them to purchase US-made weapons and redesign their armed forces away from national defense toward internal security (i.e. repression) and possible integration into US-led wars of aggression;
- Use of these close relationships with local armed forces to influence the domestic politics of weaker states;
- Perpetual military exercises with client states, which provide the Pentagon with perfect knowledge of the military potential of client states, integrate them into the US military machine, and sustain a 'ready for war' mentality.
- Deployment of its network of bases, 'allies' and military exercises so as to surround, isolate, intimidate and eventually provoke major nations perceived as potential rivals, notably Russia and China.

The implicit strategy of the United States, as perceived by its actions, is

a gradual military conquest to ensure world domination. One original feature of this world conquest project is that, although extremely active, day after day, it is virtually ignored by the vast majority of the population of the conquering nation, as well as by its most closely dominated allies, that is, the NATO states.

The endless propaganda about ‘terrorist threats’ (the fleas on the elephant) and other diversions keep most Americans totally unaware of what is going on, all the more easily in that Americans are almost uniquely ignorant of the rest of the world and, thus, totally uninterested. The US may bomb a country off the map before more than a small fraction of Americans know where to find it.

The main task of US strategists, whose careers take them between think tanks, boards of directors, consultancy firms and the government, is to justify this giant mechanism much more than to steer it. To a large extent, it steers itself.

Since the collapse of the ‘Soviet threat’, policy-makers have settled for invisible or potential threats. US military doctrine has as its aim to move preventively against any potential rival to US world hegemony. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia retains the largest arsenal outside the United States, and China is a rapidly rising economic power. Neither one threatens the United States or Western Europe. On the contrary, both are ready and willing to concentrate on peaceful business. However, they are increasingly alarmed by the military encirclement and provocative military exercises carried on by the United States on their very doorsteps. The implicit aggressive strategy may be obscure to most Americans, but leaders in the targeted countries are quite certain they understand what it is going on.

The Russia-Iran-Israel Triangle

Currently, the main explicit ‘enemy’ is Iran.

Washington claims that the ‘missile shield’ which it is forcing on its European allies is designed to defend the West from Iran. But the Russians see quite clearly that the missile shield is aimed at themselves. First of all, they understand quite clearly that Iran has no such missiles, nor any possible motive for using them against the West. It is perfectly obvious to all informed analysts that even if Iran developed nuclear weapons and missiles, they would be conceived as a deterrent against Israel, the regional nuclear superpower, which enjoys a free hand attacking neighboring countries. Israel does not want to lose that freedom to attack, and thus, naturally, opposes the Iranian deterrent.

Israeli propagandists scream loudly about the threat from Iran, and have worked incessantly to infect NATO with their paranoia. Israel has even been described as 'Global NATO's 29th member'. Israeli officials have assiduously worked on a receptive Madeleine Albright to make sure that Israeli interests are included in the 'Strategic Concept'. During the past five years, Israel and NATO have been taking part in joint naval exercises in the Red Sea and in the Mediterranean, as well as joint ground exercises from Brussels to Ukraine. On 16 October 2006, Israel became the first non-European country to reach a so-called 'Individual Co-operation Program' agreement with NATO for co-operation in 27 different areas. It is worth noting that Israel is the only country outside Europe which the US includes in the area of responsibility of its European Command (rather than the Central Command, which covers the rest of the Middle East).

At a NATO-Israel Relations seminar in Herzliya on 24 October 2006, the Israeli foreign minister at the time, Tzipi Livni, declared that 'The alliance between NATO and Israel is only natural ... Israel and NATO share a common strategic vision. In many ways, Israel is the front line defending our common way of life'.

Not everybody in European countries would consider that Israeli settlements in occupied Palestine reflect 'our common way of life'.

This is, no doubt, one reason why the deepening union between NATO and Israel has not taken the open form of NATO membership. Especially after the savage attack on Gaza, such a move would arouse objections in European countries. Nevertheless, Israel continues to invite itself into NATO, ardently supported, of course, by its faithful followers in the US Congress.

The principal cause of this growing Israel-NATO symbiosis has been identified by US writers John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt: the vigorous and powerful pro-Israel lobby in the United States. Israeli lobbies are also strong in France and Britain. They have zealously developed the theme of Israel as the 'front line' in the defense of 'Western values' against militant Islam. The fact that militant Islam is largely a product of that 'front line' creates a perfect vicious circle. Israel's aggressive stance toward its regional neighbours would be a serious liability for NATO, apt to be dragged into wars of Israel's choosing which are by no means in the interest of Europe. However, there is one subtle strategic advantage in the Israeli connection which the United States seems to be using ... against Russia.

By subscribing to the hysterical 'Iranian threat' theory, the United States can continue to claim with a straight face that the planned missile shield is

directed against Iran, not Russia. This cannot be expected to convince the Russians. But it can be used to make their protests sound ‘paranoid’ – at least to the ears of the Western faithful. Dear me, what can they be complaining about when we ‘reset’ our relations with Moscow and invite the Russian president to our ‘Strategic Concept’ happy gathering?

However, the Russians know quite well that:

- The missile shield is to be constructed surrounding Russia, which does have missiles, which it keeps for deterrence;
- By neutralizing Russian missiles, the United States would free its own hand to attack Russia, knowing that Russia could not retaliate.

Therefore, whatever is said, the missile shield, if it worked, would serve to facilitate eventual aggression against Russia.

Encircling Russia

The encirclement of Russia continues in the Black Sea, the Baltic and the Arctic Circle. United States officials continue to claim that Ukraine must join NATO. In a recent *New York Times* column, Zbigniew’s son, Ian J. Brzezinski, advised Obama against abandoning the ‘vision’ of a ‘whole, free and secure’ Europe, including ‘eventual Georgian and Ukrainian membership in NATO and the European Union’. The fact that the vast majority of the people of Ukraine are against NATO membership is of no account.

For the current scion of the noble Brzezinski dynasty it is the minority that counts. Abandoning the vision ‘undercuts those in Georgia and Ukraine who see their future in Europe. It reinforces Kremlin aspirations for a sphere of influence ...’ The notion that ‘the Kremlin’ aspires to a ‘sphere of influence’ in Ukraine is absurd considering the extremely close historic links between Russia and Ukraine, whose capital Kiev was the cradle of the Russian state. But the Brzezinski family hailed from Galicia, the part of Western Ukraine which once belonged to Poland, and which is the centre of the anti-Russian minority. US foreign policy is all too frequently influenced by such foreign rivalries, of which the vast majority of Americans are totally ignorant.

Relentless US insistence on absorbing Ukraine continues, despite the fact that it would imply expelling the Russian Black Sea fleet from its base in the Crimean peninsula, where the local population is overwhelmingly Russian-speaking and pro-Russian. This is a recipe for war with Russia if ever there was one.

And meanwhile, US officials continue to declare their support for Georgia, whose American-trained president openly hopes to bring NATO

support into his next war against Russia.

Aside from provocative naval manoeuvres in the Black Sea, the United States, NATO, and (as yet) non-NATO members Sweden and Finland regularly carry out major military exercises in the Baltic Sea, virtually in sight of the Russian cities of Saint Petersburg and Kaliningrad. These exercises involve thousands of ground troops, hundreds of aircraft including F-15 jet fighters, AWACS, as well as naval forces, including the US Carrier Strike Group 12, landing craft and warships from a dozen countries.

Perhaps most ominous of all, in the Arctic region, the United States has been persistently engaging Canada and the Scandinavian states (including Denmark via Greenland) in a military deployment openly directed against Russia. The point of these Arctic deployments was stated by Fogh Rasmussen when he mentioned, among 'threats' to be met by NATO, the fact that 'Arctic ice is retreating, for resources that had, until now, been covered under ice'.

Now, one might consider that this uncovering of resources would be an opportunity for cooperation in exploiting them. But that is not the official US mindset. Last October, US Admiral James G Stavridis, supreme Nato commander for Europe, said global warming and a race for resources could lead to a conflict in the Arctic. Coast Guard Rear Admiral Christopher C. Colvin, in charge of Alaska's coastline, said Russian shipping activity in the Arctic Ocean was 'of particular concern' for the US, and called for more military facilities in the region.

The US Geological Service believes that the Arctic contains up to a quarter of the world's unexplored deposits of oil and gas. Under the 1982 United Nations Law of the Sea Convention, a coastal state is entitled to a 200-nautical mile exclusive economic zone, and can claim a further 150 miles if it proves that the seabed is a continuation of its continental shelf. Russia is applying to make this claim.

After pushing for the rest of the world to adopt the Convention, the United States Senate has still not ratified the Treaty.

In January 2009, NATO declared the 'High North' to be 'of strategic interest to the Alliance', and since then, NATO has held several major war games clearly preparing for eventual conflict with Russia over Arctic resources. Russia largely dismantled its defenses in the Arctic after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and has called for negotiating compromises over resource control.

Last September, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin called for joint efforts to protect the fragile ecosystem, attract foreign investment, promote

environmentally friendly technologies, and work to resolve disputes through international law. But the United States, as usual, prefers to settle the issue by throwing its weight around. This could lead to a new arms race in the Arctic, and even to armed clashes.

Despite all these provocative moves, it is most unlikely that the United States actually seeks war with Russia, although skirmishes and incidents here and there cannot be ruled out. The US policy appears to be to encircle and intimidate Russia to such an extent that it accepts a semi-satellite status which neutralizes it in the anticipated future conflict with China.

Target China

The only reason to target China is like the proverbial reason to climb the mountain: it is there. It is big. And the US must be on top of everything.

The strategy for dominating China is the same as for Russia. It is classic warfare: encirclement, siege, more or less clandestine support for internal disorder. As examples of this strategy:

- The United States is provocatively strengthening its military presence along the Pacific shores of China, offering ‘protection against China’ to East Asian countries.
- During the Cold War, when India got its armaments from the Soviet Union and struck a non-aligned posture, the United States armed Pakistan as its main regional ally. Now the US is shifting its favours to India, in order to keep India out of the orbit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and to build it as a counterweight to China.
- The United States and its allies support any internal dissidence that might weaken China, whether it is the Dalai Lama, the Uighurs, or Liu Xiaobo, the jailed dissident.

The Nobel Peace Prize was bestowed on Liu Xiaobo by a committee of Norwegian legislators headed by Thorbjorn Jagland, Norway’s echo of Tony Blair, who has served as Norway’s prime minister and foreign minister, and has been one of his country’s main cheerleaders for NATO. At a NATO-sponsored conference of European parliamentarians last year, Jagland declared: ‘when we are not able to stop tyranny, war starts. This is why NATO is indispensable. NATO is the only multilateral military organization rooted in international law. It is an organization that the UN can use when necessary – to stop tyranny, like we did in the Balkans.’ This is an astoundingly bold mis-statement of fact, considering that NATO openly defied international law and the United Nations to make war in the Balkans – where, in reality, there was ethnic conflict, but no ‘tyranny’.

In announcing the choice of Liu, the Norwegian Nobel committee,

headed by Jagland, declared that it ‘has long believed that there is a close connection between human rights and peace’. The ‘close connection’, to follow the logic of Jagland’s own statements, is that if a foreign state fails to respect human rights according to Western interpretations, it may be bombed, as NATO bombed Yugoslavia. Indeed, the very powers that make the most noise about ‘human rights’, notably the United States and Britain, are the ones making the most wars all over the world. The Norwegian’s statements make it clear that granting the Nobel Peace Prize to Liu (who in his youth spent time in Norway) amounted, in reality, to an endorsement of NATO.

‘Democracies’ to replace the United Nations

The European members of NATO add relatively little to the military power of the United States. Their contribution is above all political. Their presence maintains the illusion of an ‘International Community’. The world conquest being pursued by the bureaucratic inertia of the Pentagon can be presented as the crusade by the world’s ‘democracies’ to spread their enlightened political order to the rest of a recalcitrant world.

The Euro-Atlantic governments proclaim their ‘democracy’ as proof of their absolute right to intervene in the affairs of the rest of the world. On the basis of the fallacy that ‘human rights are necessary for peace’, they proclaim their right to make war. A crucial question is whether ‘Western democracy’ still has the strength to dismantle this war machine before it is too late.

Author’s note: Grateful thanks to Rick Rozoff for his constant flow of important information (contact b-antinato@yahoo.com).

Published with grateful acknowledgements to Global Research (www.globalresearch.ca).