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**NOTES FOR ADDRESS TO
THE PARLIAMENT COMMITTEE
ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**



Notes For Address To Standing Committee Foreign Affairs And International Trade on February 15, 2000.



1. INTRODUCTION

I wish to thank the Committee for giving me the opportunity of speaking this morning.

It is some comfort to know that although I was not allowed to speak to anyone in the Canadian embassy in Belgrade during a recent visit there that I am free to speak to members of the Canadian parliament.

I have been an out spoken critic of the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia. I believe it to have been a tragic mistake --- a historic miscalculation that will have far reaching implications.

When NATO bombs fell on Yugoslavia in the spring and summer of last year, they caused more than just death and destruction in that country. The bombs also struck at the heart of international law and delivered a serious blow to the framework of global security that since the end of the Second World War has protected all of us from the horrors of a nuclear war.

Kosovo broke the ground rules for NATO engagement and the aggressive military intervention by NATO into the affairs of a sovereign state for other than defensive purposes marked an ominous turning point in the aims and objectives of that organization. It is important that we understand this and seek clarification as to whether this was a "one-off" aberration or a signal of fundamental change in the nature and purposes of the organization. This is something the committee might well examine in the course of its work.

2. AN ILLEGAL WAR

NATO's war in Kosovo was conducted without the approval of the United Nations Security Council. It was a violation of international law, the United Nations charter and its own Article 1, which requires NATO to settle any international disputes by peaceful means and not to threaten or use force, "in any manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations."

Apologists for NATO including our own foreign and defense ministers try to avoid this issue by simply not mentioning it. There has been no attempt to explain why the United Nations Security Council was ignored. No effort to spell out under whose authority did NATO bomb Yugoslavia. The ministers and their officials continue to justify the air strikes on the grounds that the bombs were necessary to stop ethnic cleansing and atrocities, despite all the evidence that by far the bulk of the ethnic cleansing took place after the bombing not before it. It was the bombing that triggered off the worst of the ethnic cleansing.



William Cohen

As for the atrocities it now seems that here again we were lied to about the extent of the crimes committed. United States Secretary of Defense Cohen told us that at least 100,000 Kosovars had perished. Tony Blair spoke of genocide being carried out in Kosovo. The media relished in these atrocity stories and printed every story told to them by Albanian, “eye witnesses.” The myth that the war was to stop ethnic cleansing and atrocities continues to be perpetrated by department spokesmen and large parts of the media.

No one wants to defend atrocities and the numbers game in such circumstances becomes sordid. Nevertheless numbers do become important if they are used to justify military action against a sovereign state. In the case of Kosovo it appears that about 2000 people were killed there prior to the NATO bombing. Considering that a civil war had been underway since 1993 this is not a remarkable figure and compared with a great many other hot spots hardly enough to warrant a 79-day bombing campaign. It is also interesting to note that the UN tribunal indictment of Milosevic of May 1999, cites only one incident of deaths before the bombing...the infamous Racak incident... which itself is challenged by French journalists who were on the ground there and suspect a frame-up involving US general Walker who sounded the alarm.

The Kosovo “war” reveals disturbing evidence of how lies and duplicity can mislead us into accepting things that we instinctively know to be wrong. Jamie Shea and other NATO apologists have lied to us about the bombing. The sad thing is that most of the Canadian media, and our political representatives have accepted without question what has been told to us by NATO and our own foreign affairs spokesmen.

3. AN UNNECESSARY WAR

Perhaps the most serious charge against the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia is that it was unnecessary. NATO chose bombing over diplomacy. Violence over negotiation. NATO’s leaders tried to convince us that dropping tons of bombs on Yugoslavia was serving humanitarian purposes.

A UN Security Council resolution of October 1998 accepted by Yugoslavia, authorized over 1300 monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe [OSCE] to enter Kosovo and try to de-escalate the fighting. From the accounts of a number of these monitors their task was successful. While cease-fire violations continued on both sides the intensity of the armed struggle was considerably abated.

The former Czech foreign minister, Jiri Dienstbier, and Canada’s own Rollie Keith of Vancouver... both monitors for the OSCE on the ground in Kosovo... have publicly stated that there were no international refugees over the last five months of the OSCE’s presence in Kosovo and the number of internally displaced only amounted to a few thousands in the weeks leading up to the bombing.

The OSCE mission demonstrated that diplomacy and negotiation might well have resolved the Kosovo problem without resorting to the use of force. It was the failure of the United States to accept any flexibility in its dealing with Belgrade in the weeks leading up to the war that spelled diplomatic failure.

The adamant refusal of the USA to involve either the Russians or the United Nations in the negotiations. The refusal to allow any other intermediary to deal with Milosevic and finally the imposition of the Rambouillet ultimatum which was clearly designed to ensure that Yugoslavia had no choice but to refuse its insulting terms.

It is now generally accepted by those who have seen the Rambouillet agreement that no sovereign state could have agreed to its conditions. The insistence of allowing access to all of Yugoslavia by NATO forces and the demand that a referendum on autonomy be held within three years guaranteed a Serbian rejection.

The Serbian parliament did, however, on March 23, state a willingness to “examine the character and extent of an international presence in Kosovo immediately after the signing of an autonomy accord acceptable to all national communities in Kosovo, the local Serb minority included.” The United States was not interested in pursuing this offer. NATO needed its war. NATO’s formal commitment to resolve international disputes by peaceful means was thrown out the window.

The Rambouillet document itself was not easily obtained from NATO sources. The Chairman of the Defense Committee of the French National Assembly asked for a copy shortly after the bombing commenced but was not given a copy until a few days before the UN peace treaty was signed. I hope that members of this committee have a copy to look at and will be able to find out when and if Canada was informed of its conditions.

4. NATO’S CAMPAIGN A TOTAL FAILURE

We have been asked to believe that the war in Kosovo was fought for human rights. Indeed the president of the Czech republic received a standing ovation in this House of Commons when he stated that Kosovo was the first war fought for human values rather than territory. I suspect even president Havel would have second thoughts about that statement now that a large part of Yugoslav territory has in effect been handed over to the Albanians.

The war allegedly to stop ethnic cleansing has not done so. Serbs, Gypsies, Jews, and Slav Muslims are being forced out of Kosovo under the eyes of 45,000 NATO troops. Murder and anarchy reigns supreme in Kosovo as the KLA and criminal elements have taken charge. The United Nations admits failure to control the situation and warns Serbs not to return.



The war allegedly to restore stability to the Balkans has done the opposite. Yugoslavia's neighbors are in a state of turmoil. Montenegro is on the edge of civil war. Macedonia is now worried that Kosovo has shown the way for its own sizeable Albanian minority to demand self-determination. Albania has been encouraged to strive harder to fulfill its dream of Greater Albania. Serbia itself has been ruined economically.... embittered and disillusioned it feels betrayed and alienated from the western democracies.



The illegal and unnecessary war has alienated the other great nuclear powers, Russia and China. These countries are now convinced that the west cannot be trusted. NATO expansion eastward is seen as an aggressive and hostile threat and will be answered by an increase in the nuclear arsenal of both nations. After Kosovo who can with any conviction convince them that NATO is purely a defensive alliance dedicated to peace and to upholding the principles of the United Nations?

More seriously the NATO bombing has destroyed NATO's credibility. NATO stood for more than just a powerful military organization. It stood for peace; the rule of law, and democratic institutions. The bombing of Yugoslavia threw all of that out the window.

No longer can NATO stand on the moral high ground. Its action in Yugoslavia revealed it to be an aggressive military machine prepared to ignore international law and intervene with deadly force in the internal affairs of any state with whose actions or behavior it does not agree.

5. CONCLUSIONS

There are those who believe that the long standing principle of state sovereignty can be over ruled when human rights violations are taking place in a country. Until Kosovo the ground rules for such intervention called for Security Council authority before such action could be taken. Apologists for NATO argue that it was unlikely Security Council authority could have been obtained because of the veto power of China or Russia. So it would appear rather than even try to get consent NATO took upon itself the powers of the Security Council. I am not sure we should all be comfortable with this development.

Undoubtedly there may be times when such intervention is justified and immediately Rwanda comes to mind...but intervention for humanitarian reasons is a dangerous concept. Because who is to decide when to take such action and under whose authority? Hitler intervened in Czechoslovakia because he claimed the human rights of the Sudeten Germans were being violated. Those who advocate a change in the current rules for intervention are free to do so but until the rules change should we not all obey the ones that still have legitimacy?

NATO made a serious mistake in Kosovo. Its bombing campaign was not only an unmitigated disaster but it changed fundamentally the very nature and purposes of the

alliance. Does article 1 of the NATO treaty still stand? Does NATO still undertake to settle any international disputes in which it may become involved by peaceful means? Do the NATO countries still undertake to refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force in any manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations?

Kosovo should serve as a warning call that Canadian democracy needs a shot in the arm to wake it up to the realities that foreign policy is important—important because as happened one day last march Canadians can wake up and find they are at war. Canadian pilots were bombing Serbia. Yet there was no declaration of war. The Canadian parliament was not consulted. The majority of the Canadian people had no idea where Kosovo was - let alone understand why our aircraft were bombing cities in a fellow nation state that had been a staunch ally during two world wars.

It was not only Yugoslav sovereignty that was violated by NATO's illegal action. Canadian sovereignty was also abused. Canada had become involved in a war without any member of the Canadian parliament or the Canadian people being consulted. The ultimate expression of a nation's sovereignty is the right to declare war. NATO abrogated this right.



If it essential that we give up some of our sovereignty as the price we pay for membership in global institutions such as NATO then it is mandatory that such institutions follow their own rules, respect the rule of law, and operate within the generally accepted framework of the United Nations charter. This NATO did not do. It is for this reason I would suggest your committee must ask some tough questions about the nature of Canada's involvement in the Kosovo war.

James Bissett



Ambassador Bissett was born in the small village of DELORAINE, located in the South-West corner of Manitoba close to the U.S. border and the Province of Saskatchewan. During the Second World War his family moved to Winnipeg and he received his secondary and university education in that city. It was there he became interested in Eastern European cultures and history

After pursuing postgraduate studies in history and political science he won a fellowship to study Public Administration at Carleton University in Ottawa. Upon obtaining his Masters Degree he joined the public service in 1956.

He spent 37 years as a Canadian Public Servant in the Department of Citizenship and Immigration and Foreign Affairs. He was appointed head of the Immigration Foreign Service in 1974 and became Assistant Under-Secretary of State for Social Affairs in 1980. In the early '70s he served at the Canadian High Commission in London England. He was appointed Canadian High Commissioner to Trinidad and Tobago in 1982 and served there until 1985 when he was seconded to the Department of Employment and Immigration as Executive Director to help steer new immigration and refugee legislation through Parliament.

In 1990 he was appointed Canadian Ambassador to Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Albania. He therefore witnessed at first hand the Yugoslav tragedy to which he attributes much of the blame to Western diplomatic blundering and deliberate scheming. He was recalled from Yugoslavia in the summer of 1992.

He retired from the Foreign Service upon leaving Yugoslavia and accepted a job in Moscow as the head of an International organization helping the Russian Government establish a new Immigration Ministry and designing and implementing settlement programs for the thousands of Russians returning to Russia from other parts of the former Soviet Union. He returned from Moscow in 1997 and is enjoying retirement in Ottawa but continues to do contract work from time to time.



Ambassador Bissett is married and has 5 children and 8 grand children. He was shocked at NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia and has been an outspoken critic of the war, appearing frequently on radio and television and on speaking engagements across Canada.