

Two Anniversaries: War Crimes Hypocrisy



By Ron Forthofer

Robert Jackson, a U.S. Supreme Court Justice and the chief U.S. prosecutor at the Nuremberg Trials of Nazis, said: "To initiate a war of aggression, therefore, is not only an international crime; it is the supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole." Justice Jackson also added: "If certain acts in violation of treaties are crimes they are crimes whether the United States does them or whether Germany does them, and we are not prepared to lay down a rule of criminal conduct against others which we would not be willing to have invoked against us."

Defendant Albert Speer, Hitler's War Production Minister, made an important point when he stated, "This trial is necessary. There is a shared responsibility for such horrible crimes even in an authoritarian state." The shared responsibility for war crimes is clearly even greater in a democratic state.

Let's consider two current anniversaries of aggressions in light of the above. Nine years ago, on March 24, 1999, the U.S. led an attack by NATO on Yugoslavia in [violation of international law](#). President Bill Clinton and other members of his administration grossly misrepresented the situation in Kosovo, a province of the Serbian republic of Yugoslavia, in an effort to convince the U.S. public of the need for military action. However, before launching the attack, the Clinton administration entered into negotiations where U.S. 'diplomats' made unreasonable demands that Yugoslavia was almost certain to reject. When Yugoslavia rejected the demands and offered a counterproposal, the Clinton administration claimed it had exhausted all diplomatic efforts and that military action was required. The ever-compliant U.S. corporate mainstream media, with a few honorable exceptions, served as stenographers for the administration and helped build support for the illegal attack.

In addition to committing the 'supreme international crime', NATO forces, under the leadership of General Wesley Clark, committed additional war crimes with numerous attacks on civilian Yugoslavian targets. The 78-day bombing campaign, along with mediation from a Finnish-Russian

team, finally convinced Yugoslavia to agree to withdraw its forces from Kosovo. Unfortunately this NATO aggression did little to resolve the situation while, at the same time, it led to the expulsion of much of the Serbian population from Kosovo. Tensions between Albanian Kosovars and Serbs remain high today, and NATO troops are still needed to prevent a flare-up of the violence. The recent recognition by the U.S. and some of the European Union nations of the illegal secession of Kosovo from Serbia has further weakened the rule of law and set the stage for future conflicts in the Balkans and elsewhere.

We are also commemorating the five-year anniversary of the illegal U.S.-led attack on Iraq, another 'supreme international crime'. To create a climate for war, the Bush administration and the compliant U.S. corporate media simply resurrected Clinton's game plan. Bush administration officials claimed that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), and the U.S. corporate media, again with a few notable exceptions, uncritically parroted this false accusation. Given the Clinton administration had also made this same false accusation, it was relatively easy to convince an uninformed U.S. public. The U.N. dispatched weapons inspectors to Iraq to examine this charge, but they found no WMDs. While the inspectors were still searching, the U.S. tried to obtain support for an attack at the U.N. but was rebuffed. Bush, similar to Clinton in 1999, then told the U.S. public he had exhausted diplomatic efforts, and he was now forced to resort to use of the military.

The Iraqi people have paid and continue to pay an incredible price as a result of the U.S.-led aggression. The magnitude of the suffering and human tragedy that grows worse with each passing day is hard to fathom. The future for Iraq and Iraqis looks dismal, and the view grows worse the longer the U.S. occupation continues. U.S. forces and their families are also paying a high price for this criminal campaign, and the cost to the U.S. economy is huge and unsustainable. However, many in the military-industrial complex and other corporate/financial interests continue to grow richer. In 1933 Major General Smedley Butler stated it well:

"War is just a racket. A racket is best described, I believe, as something that is not what it seems to the majority of people. Only a small inside group knows what it is about. It is conducted for the benefit of the very few at the expense of the masses. ...

"I spent most of my time being a high-class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street and the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism."

Under the Nuremberg principles, high-ranking members of both the current and immediate past U.S. presidential administrations belong on trial for war crimes. In addition, based on Speer's statement at Nuremberg, shouldn't members of Congress who voted in favor of the attacks or who voted to fund the continuation of the 'supreme international crime' be tried? How about those in the corporate media who were, in effect, propagandists for these illegal aggressions? If the so-called civilized world allows Clinton, Bush and others to avoid war crime trials, their escape would make a mockery of Justice Jackson's Nuremberg statement and further undercut the rule of law. The message would be that might triumphs over right.

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