

Who is represented by NATO? May 10 1999 (written for *The Sudbury Star*; published Friday, May 14 as *Support for bombing meagre*).

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Reading the press releases flowing from NATO headquarters, it is hard to ignore the frequency with which NATO claims to be waging war against Yugoslavia on behalf of the "international community."

Constant references to the "international community" have a reason. NATO leaders know that the only legal basis for NATO action is the claim that when human rights are somehow judged to have been sufficiently violated by a country, then the "international community" has the right to attack that country with as much force as it deems necessary.

The shakiest part of this claim is the idea that NATO, a military alliance of 19 countries in Europe and North America, represents an "international community" having about 170 other countries from three other continents, including an estimated 4.7 billion people in the less-developed world.

Some of these other countries do support NATO bombing, though they are not necessarily ones associated with liberal humanitarianism. By far the strongest levels of support for NATO bombing come from Croatia and Albania. Support has also been expressed by Malaysia, where Islam is the country's official religion, and by the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. In the Islamic countries of the Middle East, despite considerable dissension, some have supported the bombing.

But the governments of a great many countries have quite clearly expressed their opposition to NATO war-making, including some of the most populous ones such as China (1.26 billion people), India (967 million), and Russia (147 million), all three of which possess nuclear arsenals.

On May 8 China's position as an opponent of NATO's actions became clear to all. China denounced NATO's missile attack on the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, in which three Chinese were killed and about twenty injured, and called for an unconditional end to bombing. The embassy bombing sparked massive demonstrations in numerous Chinese cities and even demonstrations by Chinese outside of China, such as in Toronto on May 9, when Chinese-Canadians joined Serbian-Canadians for an anti-NATO demonstration of more than 1,500 people.

The U.S. called the bombing a regrettable accident, an explanation the Chinese have yet to accept, presumably on the grounds that if you respect a foreign power you make it your top priority to avoid bombing its embassies by "mistake." Rather than offer to punish the culprits and thereby accept some responsibility, Deputy U.S. Ambassador Burleigh blamed it on Yugoslavia for having brought about NATO's bombing campaign.

The Russians naturally viewed this as irresponsible finger-pointing: expressing regret for your actions without accepting responsibility for them does not constitute an apology.

Russian Ambassador Lavrov rejected Burleigh's claim, saying the big picture was that NATO's "military adventurism" was threatening to "destroy the present world order." Russian President Yeltsin repeated warnings of "very harsh consequences" should the bombing continue, adding that "responsibility for those consequences fully rests with those who masterminded this venture." Opinion polls have shown Russian public support for NATO bombing at about 2 percent.

From India, the Foreign Minister claimed that the Chinese embassy bombing was "proof that NATO was mistaken in trying to use force to bend Yugoslavia to its will." He echoed views expressed weeks earlier by the Indian Prime Minister: "We oppose the use of force as such actions violate the sovereignty of a nation."

China, India, and Russia are respectively the world's first, second, and sixth most populous countries. Indonesia -- the world's fourth most populous country (210 million) and the world's largest Islamic country -- has not been as vocal as these other population giants, but it has called for a quick return to diplomacy. Brazil, the world's fifth most populous country (168 million), has criticized NATO's bypassing of the United Nations and has called for a negotiated solution, as has South Africa (42 million), Africa's leading democracy, in a strong statement issued on March 26 by the Foreign Affairs department.

Opposition to NATO's attack on Yugoslavia can also be found in NATO countries. Polls have shown substantial opposition to NATO bombing of Serb military installations from citizens in Germany and France; strong opposition in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Italy; and fierce opposition in Greece. And these are polls taken when Yugoslav targets were what NATO now describes as "purely military targets" and those polled had no idea that bombing missions would soon bring death to hundreds of civilians and injury to thousands more.

Outside of NATO, two of the leading democratic allies of the U.S., NATO's dominant power, have been Japan and Israel. Japan, in a Ministry of Foreign Affairs statement issued on April 27, deplored the mistreatment of Kosovo civilians, and offered aid for refugees. The statement, however, studiously avoided both direct support for the bombing and direct criticism of the Yugoslav government. It emphasized the role of the United Nations in representing the international community to bring an end to hostilities, and made additional aid contingent upon a peace agreement. The Japanese Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister have wobbled and made some guarded remarks in support of NATO, but now feel increasing pressure to recognize both Chinese concerns and the growing anti-bombing sentiment expressed by Japan's leading newspapers.

The official Israeli position has greatly resembled Japan's. Israel has supplied aid and accepted refugees, but the first press release issued by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not take sides and called for a return to the negotiating table. Even after pressure was applied by angry officials from the U.S. State Department, the Ministry only issued a statement adding an expression of friendship with the U.S. and NATO to a renewed call for "an end to suffering of the innocent" and the "resumption of negotiations."

The evidence is clear. NATO leaders must stop pretending that world opinion solidly supports NATO bombing. This is partly prudent geo-politics in a post-Cold War world in which alignments have become unstable and nuclear arsenals are acquiring renewed relevance.

It is also a matter of legality, as we are reminded by the complaint lodged with the International War Crimes Tribunal by a group of Canadian lawyers and law professors. The complaint documents NATO's violation of the United Nations Charter, the Geneva Convention, the Nuremberg Tribunal and its own Treaty, and it names our Prime Minister among those to be tried for war crimes. It would not go unheeded in a world where, for example, a Chinese-Indian-Russian alliance constituted the dominant power.

Note: Population figures are estimates for 1997.

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