

Who are the people in your neighbourhood?

One of the oldest of the old sayings is the so-called Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Naturally, this also means that one shouldn't do unto others what you wouldn't want them to do unto you. The nations that make up the modern global community usually follow this policy in that most of them prudently avoid invading, pillaging, or otherwise damaging other countries. After all, you don't want the same thing to happen to your nation; however, when it comes to other countries doing badly unto our global neighbors we high-minded nations tend to be a bit less idealistically picky. Unless a threatened country is the seat of an important resource or alliance, its troubles are usually politely ignored by more fortunate nations. A troubling example of this insular international apathy is the deterioration of Yugoslavia and the slowness of western nations to react to it. Once a solidly communist confederation of ethnically varied states, Yugoslavia's central government fell apart like that of many other European nations, and the Yugoslav peoples were driven by ancient ethnic hatreds and nationalist ambitions to split apart. War ensued between the fragments of Yugoslavia, a war that over the course of many bloody months has seen countless deaths, inestimable destruction, the systematic rape of women by soldiers, and brutal policies of "ethnic cleansing" (genocide by any other name). In short, the former Yugoslavia has become the scene of innumerable atrocities, and wealthy western nations have, for the most part, stood by and watched.

This cold-blooded inactivity is made more appalling when one compares it to western nations' treatment of other troubled countries when it has been in the interests of the more powerful nations. This practice stretches back over decades, as in the power games of the now-defunct "Cold War" between the Communist Bloc nations and the "Free World" nations of America and her allies. America would do almost anything to block the expansion of a potentially threatening rival power, including

the protection of other nations from the dire threat of communist influence or takeover. For instance, in 1947 then-U.S. President Truman was given permission by Congress for four hundred million dollars (an even larger sum in those days) in aid for Greece and Turkey to help those countries resist "communist aggression", attempts to forcibly recruit them as Russian "satellite" states. Similar generosity on the part of the Americans came in the Berlin Blockade of 1948-49 when Russia tried to block off all routes into the segment of Berlin occupied by the western nations. The Americans and

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their allies responded by airlifting food and supplies to Allied Berlin day and night for eleven months, until the Russians lifted the blockade in frustration. The United States, the world learned, would do anything to halt the spread of communism.

More recently, American-led global troubleshotting has reared its self-interested head in policies regarding Iraq's aggression toward its neighbor, Kuwait. Kuwait's rich oil resources are tremendously important to nations like Canada and the U.S., so when Saddam Hussein invaded the tiny country virtually everyone went in with guns-a-blazing, denouncing the heinous Iraqi act of war and chasing the invaders out of Kuwait. Kuwait's stability was in western interests, so its safety was assured. Hussein was labelled the next Hitler and America committed troops and resources to patrolling the "no-fly zone" to ensure that Iraqi planes

and artillery would threaten neither the Kuwaiti border nor Kurdish refugees fleeing Hussein's regime. Kuwait remains secure and the western world therefore retains access to the region's invaluable energy resources.

Unfortunately, oil runs thicker than blood. The invasion of Kuwait was an act of war but pales in comparison to the horrors of the ongoing war in Yugoslavia. The Serbians, with their brutal policies of "ethnic cleansing", are far more fittingly cast as modern Hitlers than Saddam Hussein. The systematic rape, slaughter, and internment of innocent people in concentration camps on the basis of their ethnic or cultural background is almost unbelievable, and while nations the world over have expressed shock and horror they have refused to do anything to stop it. Bosnia has been decimated and all but absorbed by Serbia and there are fears that the ethnic fighting could spread throughout the historically unstable Balkan nations and create a massive conflict of a type Europeans have not seen since the World Wars, the first of which began in the Balkans.

History's lessons are ignored judging by the reluctance of western nations to try to end the fighting. The commitment of troops and resources to an outside conflict is never to be considered lightly, but it is still frustratingly hypocritical to see an outpouring of support to places like Kuwait while Yugoslavia drowns in its own blood. Unless they correspond with economic or diplomatic interests, human rights interests can be all too routinely ignored, and one wishes that some central body like the United Nations would establish and implement a more fair and consistent policy of global peacekeeping. In the meantime, though, safety in the international community can only be guaranteed by being of financial or strategic importance. That having been said, the slowness of western nations to aid Yugoslavia is sadly, as one analyst put it, "completely disgraceful but understandably disgraceful."

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