

NATO can't resolve all Europe's troubles

It may be shrouded in the melodramatic verbosity of presidential speechwriters, but an actual coherent foreign policy seems to be emerging as Bill Clinton continues his multi-nation tour of Europe this week.

Clinton has chosen a cautious path in his dealing with three of the most pressing problems facing Europe today: the troubled march toward capitalism and democracy for the nations of Eastern Europe, the growing specter of Russian nationalism, and the ongoing war in the former republics of Yugoslavia.

Central to all three issues is the evolving role of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, a Cold War creation that is now being called on to cure most of the afflictions of post-Cold War Europe.

While in Brussels to attend a NATO summit meeting, Clinton is expected to urge his fellow NATO leaders not to admit former Soviet bloc nations such as Poland and the Czech Republic into the multinational defense organization. Clinton's plan, dubbed the "Partnership for Peace," offers closer cooperation but wisely resists the temptation to welcome the fledgling democracies into the NATO nest.

It is vitally necessary that Eastern Europe not be left out in the cold. The strong Western democracies and economic powers need to encourage those countries, even assist them financially. But to put them on an equal plane with the long-time NATO powers would be negligent.

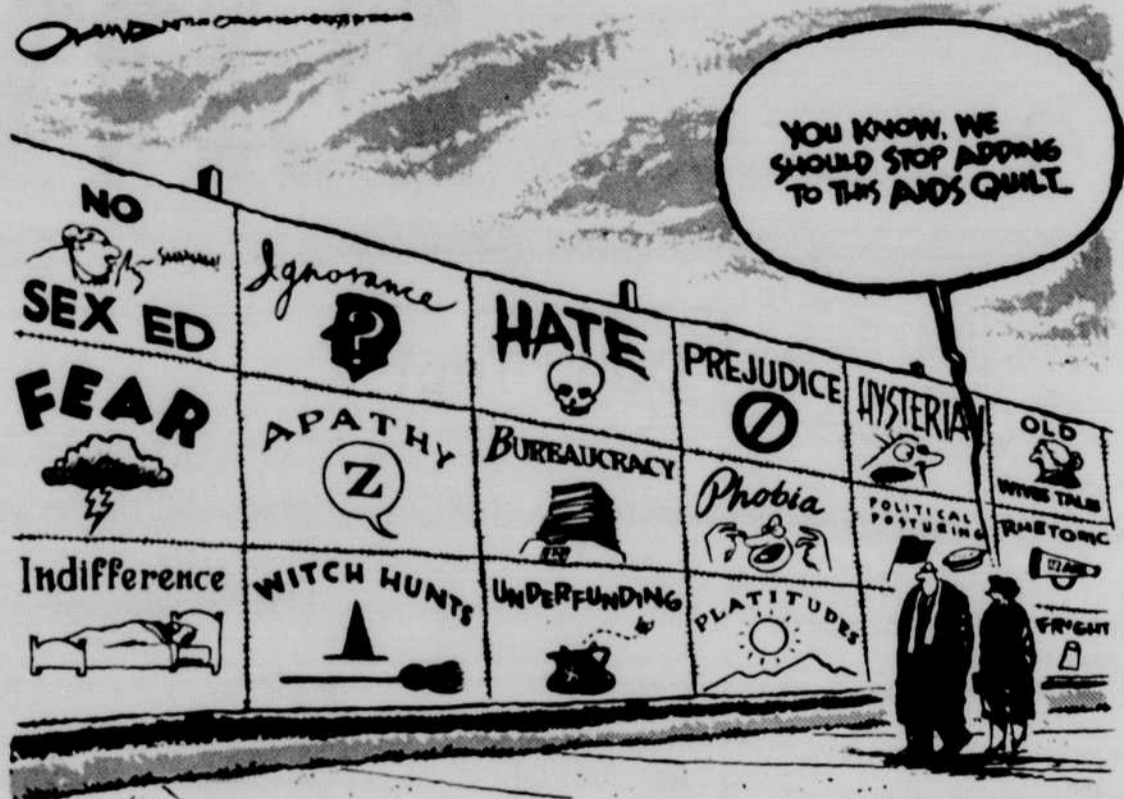
The nations of Eastern Europe are on the road to democracy, but there's no guarantee that they'll get there. The Bosnian situation proves that the potential for ethnic conflicts and nationalistic warfare still exists in Eastern Europe. If NATO agrees to accept an Eastern European country prematurely, and such a conflict does break out, the integrity of NATO could be shattered. What would happen if a NATO country attacked another NATO country? No one knows. Let's not find out.

Closely related to the question of how to help Eastern Europe is the debate over what the West can do to counter the growing forces of nationalism in the Russian Republic. The success of Russia's ultranationalist Liberal Democratic Party in parliamentary elections last month presents a danger for the future of Europe as well as Russia. Admitting Eastern European countries to NATO would only inflame the nationalists and drive Russia further away from democracy.

The final nagging problem in Europe, the war in Bosnia, refuses to leave the consciences of world leaders, even though it rarely makes the front page of the newspaper anymore. Asking NATO to intervene is understandable, but the United States should not end up carrying the burden all alone. It is first and foremost a European problem, and if there's a solution, Europe should be willing to lead the way.

NATO is a military alliance. It was designed to repel attacks from the outside. It was not designed as a way to ensure peace for everyone, just for its member nations.

In post-Cold War Europe, the role of NATO is different. Its members, particularly the United States, should be careful not to let it be used for purposes that it was not intended.



OPINION

Clinton, condoms and your TV



ROBBIE REEVES

Racing across the floor in a room in which a couple is passionately having sex, it jumps under the sheets, past a rather startled cat.

It's Supercondom to the rescue! OK, so that's a bit on the dramatic side, but it did catch your attention.

That's exactly what the federal government hopes to do with its new condom and safer-sex awareness campaign.

The Clinton administration is releasing a series of public service announcements that describe several ways to avoid contracting HIV, the virus that leads to AIDS.

One ad, described above, is designed to urge young people to use a condom if they are going to have sex. While the condom on the ad flies across the floor, an announcer says something like "It would be nice if latex condoms were automatic. But since they're not, using them should be."

Another of the ads has a man and woman hugging, and while she unbuttons his shirt, she asks, "Did you bring it?" referring to the "c" word. When he replies that he forgot it, she says, "Then forget it!"

In yet another ad, abstinence is promoted. Two versions of the ad have either a male or female talk to an off-screen companion and say that they would "never put you in danger" and, "There is a time to be lovers. We will wait until that time comes."

All of the ads have a toll-free telephone number (1-800-342-AIDS) that a person can call to ask questions or to get a free brochure about AIDS.

Who hasn't been told before that if a person is going to have sex, they should use a condom because it can significantly reduce one's chances of contracting HIV or other diseases?

However, the word "condom" was taboo in both the Reagan and Bush administrations because (get this) they didn't want to condone sex outside of marriage.

The most groundbreaking ad that the Bush administration put on the air to combat the spread of AIDS didn't even refer to condoms at all. Instead, the Bush-era anti-AIDS ad required a little decoding.

In the ad, a young barefoot man said that he could save his life by putting on his socks. He then, slowly and deliberately, put on his socks and conceded that while putting on his socks didn't save his life, "there's something just as simple that could."

The ad made people think of preventing AIDS by putting on a sock. How prude. Even in my (rather conservative) high school, Planned Parenthood came in and put a condom on a cucumber during a demonstration. Contrary to the Bush message, a sock will not prevent you from contracting HIV.

AIDS is a serious disease that there is no cure for. AIDS needs to be taken seriously. These ads are a step in that direction.

So, in a way, the Clinton administration is breaking new ground in telling Americans about protecting themselves from AIDS.

It's about time. According to statistics, 40,000 new HIV cases will occur in America this year. And not one of those cases needs to happen.

The campaign is not without its detractors, of course.

As expected, the usual complaints are coming from the religious right and other conservatives who claim that these ads either promote promiscuity or are a waste of taxpayers' money.

In case they didn't notice, or they haven't heard before, (both of which I doubt) young people are having sex. There is really nothing that can be done to eliminate sex among young people. And if young people are going to have sex, then why shouldn't they be told how to do it as safely as possible?

And how could saving lives of American youth not be worth

every tax dollar that is spent?

However, remarkably enough, even those who are on the other side of the debate have problems with the campaign.

ACT-UP, an AIDS advocacy group, stated that "Clinton's dancing condoms won't save lives."

They're exactly right. Condoms by themselves won't save lives. But people using condoms will.

And if there is a chance, even a remote chance, to save a few lives by reinforcing what should be close to common knowledge by now, then this ad campaign would be worth every penny of the \$800,000 that it cost to produce.

Another concern about the ads are that they do not specifically focus on safe sex for gays, lesbians and bisexuals.

There is merit to that argument. Hopefully the government will have the courage to act on the suggestion. As it stands now, many of the ads, including the initial "dancing condom" ad, are designed to be gender-neutral. One isn't supposed to know if a man and a woman, two women or two men are under the covers.

Fortunately, Americans seem to be receptive to these ads. Unfortunately, on the other hand, the television networks are giving the ads a rather chilly reception.

ABC has revealed that it will only show the ads after 9 p.m. Other networks have not formally announced their plans.

Although it's a good sign that television networks will broadcast the word condom (something that our government wouldn't do), they still think that it is "dirty" in some way that would necessitate showing it later in the evening.

The word "condom" is not a bad word. It is something that could save someone's life.

These ads should be broadcast just as often, if not more often, as the other public service announcements. It is absolutely essential that the message of safer sex be ingrained upon the minds of all of the sexually active population of the country.

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