

**BOSNIA** / A growing number of U.S. liberals, most of whom opposed the war in Vietnam and the U.S. lead in the Persian Gulf War, say the United States should intervene in the conflict in former Yugoslavia. They were right then, the writer says, and they're wrong now

## Where have all the doves gone?

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SINCE last summer, I've noticed that a growing number of American liberals — most of them strident opponents of the war in Vietnam and many of them critical of the United States' leadership in the Persian Gulf War — now loudly insist on one or another form of U.S. military intervention in the Bosnian nightmare.

Liberal bellicosity is everywhere, from the nation's op-ed pages to television talk shows to ad hoc groups raising money and writing ads. A few weeks ago I was asked to sign an open letter to President Bill Clinton calling for removal of the arms embargo on the Bosnian government. To my surprise, the signatories included some of my closest associates in the peace movement — activists who have long opposed military adventurism, jingoistic foreign policy and the export of U.S. weapons.

My dovish-compatriots-turned-hawks phrase their demands for military action in the vernacular of human rights and a sincere desire to end the killing. Curiously, when their moral outrage turns specific, they resort to the euphemistic Pentagonese of the Vietnam era: Besides "lifting embargos" they want to "send a message" to the Serbians with "limited" or "focused" "air strikes," enforcement of "no-fly zones" and the commitment of "peacekeeping" infantry under United Nations supervision.

But underlying these code words is nothing less than a call for war against Serbia; what divides the peace-loving militants seems to be only the degree to which they wish to avenge the killings of Bosnian Muslims by Serbian Christians.

Why do post-Vietnam liberals want to get America mixed up in another bloody civil war overseas? In part, they remain parishioners in the church of Woodrow Wilson, our first "liberal" internationalist president. Unlike the blatant jingo Teddy Roosevelt, who unashamedly proclaimed the superiority of American civilization and the tonic effect of war, Wilson asserted his global ambition in Calvinist sermons about America's mission to redeem the world. His homilies about "making the world safe for democracy" and "self-determination" still appeal powerfully to the unfortunate U.S. tendency — inherited from the Puritans — toward evangelical self-righteousness. "What America touches, she makes holy," was how Wilson's biographer, Lord Devlin, summed up his subject's foreign policy.

Our founding fathers, especially Thomas Jefferson and George Washington, warned against foreign crusades, preferring that this country provide an attractive example for the world, not a moral code enforced by bullets. The U.S. Constitution, as Robert Nisbet has written, is "only too obviously a charter for peace, not war." But since the First World War, it is Wilson's global moralism, not Jefferson's more modest republican vision, that has captured the imagina-

tions of liberal Democrats and Republicans who hunger for an American role on the international stage.

The Vietnam war, which was founded (with a small contingent of military "advisers") and prosecuted by two "liberal" Democratic presidents, supposedly changed all this. Blind faith in American power and morality was repudiated not only by our military and political defeat, but by our own savagery against civilians. Liberals were among the first to understand that U.S. policy-makers, infected by the notion of U.S. "exceptionalism," had grossly misread the Vietnamese themselves, their relationship with China and communism in general. The Vietnam disaster, many liberals hoped, would diminish our Wilsonian arrogance — and innocence — to manageable levels.

BUT here the liberals are, pushing for military intervention in a country less cohesive than Vietnam, in a region racked by violent religious and political factionalism that most Americans barely comprehend. Here are liberals promoting a new Vietnam/Nicaragua-style domino theory: If we don't stop the Serbs in Bosnia, they'll overrun Albania, Macedonia and maybe Istanbul before you can say Munich. Here are liberals bellowing about American "honour" and "resolve" as if Bosnia were the final battleground for an America whose soul belongs exclusively to Woodrow Wilson. Here are liberals urging that we send our soldiers to

"keep peace" amidst a murderous Balkan crossfire — young men and women who signed up to serve and protect the United States.

America, of course, can help the Bosnian Muslims without helping them kill Serbians. In addition to supporting the UN negotiations, Congress might increase the pitifully low quota for Bosnians seeking asylum in the United States, something we failed to do for the Jews of Europe before the onset of the Second World War.

But I hope President Clinton won't be bullied by my moralizing liberal friends into a destructive military entanglement so early in his administration. Mr. Clinton is said to be an enthusiastic student of history, literature and the Constitution. He should quickly reacquaint himself with the Vietnam insights of his first political sponsor, Senator J. William Fulbright, and the works of Thomas Jefferson.

He might also read up on the first American war fought in the name of human rights, against the Spanish in 1898, and the subsequent U.S. slaughter of thousands of Filipinos. And he should ponder Graham Greene's remark on the purity of American motives in his Vietnam novel, *The Quiet American*: "Innocence is like a dumb leper who has lost his bell, wandering the world, meaning no harm."

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