

Gulf Update

Escalation of Military Power

Five days after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait (2 August) the United States started deploying military forces in order, we were told, to protect Saudi Arabia. By mid-November it had deployed 250,000 soldiers, marines and air personnel in and around Saudi Arabia. On 10 November came the announcement of further deployments of up to 150,000 service members and the despatch of 3 more aircraft carrier battle groups to the gulf region.

Through its awesome concentration of military power the United States is now poised to launch a massive attack against Iraq. The United States is likely to be supported by allied forces, in particular by those of Britain. The British Royal Artillery will be able to fire 60,000 rounds a day at Iraqi positions with pinpoint accuracy.

Across the whole front, more artillery could be fired in a single day than in the whole of the battle of El Alamein.

Iraqi military power is substantial but clearly inferior to the forces now arrayed against it. It is no match for US air power or US military intelligence. Iraq probably has 600,000 to 700,000 active troops, and some 3,500 to 4,000 tanks. It is also known to have chemical weapons, but these are unlikely to be used against US forces which possess adequate anti-chemical defences and impressive retaliatory capabilities.

The Horror of War

According to the prestigious US Centre for Defense Information, winning a war against Iraq would take the United States 3 months, kill around 65,000 people, wound another 230,000, and cost at least \$65 billion. Civilian casualties in and around Baghdad might exceed 100,000. In addition, there would be tens of thousands of prisoners of war, and almost certainly millions of refugees needing to be housed and fed, in addition to those already displaced by the conflict.

Apart from the possible use of chemical weapons, senior US policy makers have on more than one occasion refused to rule out the use of nuclear weapons as a moral or practical option.

Americans Speak Out

There is now growing awareness in the United States that war would be truly horrendous. This view has come through loud and clear at meetings, rallies and demonstrations across the United States. It is a view now voiced by churches, the Democrat majority in Congress and senior military figures.

The US National Council of Churches has challenged "the reckless rhetoric and imprudent behaviour of the Bush Administration" and contrasted America's response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait with its negligent disregard of the Israeli occupation of Arab territories.

Testifying before Congress, recently retired Admiral Crowe, formerly head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, warned that war would be "a bloody mess" and insisted that sanctions must be given time to work.

Also testifying before Congress former US Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara warned that there would be thousands upon thousands of casualties. He added: "I do not believe any single human being should take this nation to war by his own decision, and that includes the President".

Australia's Response

On 4 December the Prime Minister announced a major expansion of Australia's involvement by allowing Australian warships to serve in active combat in the event of war in the Persian Gulf.

The Rainbow Alliance described the decision as "dangerous and unacceptable".

The commitment of Australian military forces overseas—for the first time since Vietnam—has been widely criticised as

- * encouraging the United States to pursue a military solution
- * bowing yet again to American pressure
- * ignoring other options more likely to further a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Time to Stop War

The last two weeks have seen some positive developments: the willingness of the Bush administration to talk directly with the Iraqis; Baghdad's decision to release all remaining hostages.

These moves could be the prelude to a peaceful settlement. They could also be political ploys before all-out war.

One thing is clear: the issue is not about "winning" or compelling surrender. The issue is how to achieve peace with justice.

Why, then, not link Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait with a settlement of the Palestinian question and Israel's withdrawal from Arab territories. France's President Mitterand has already hinted at such a possibility. It would enable Saddam Hussein to save face. More importantly, it would be a major step towards peace in the Middle East.

AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR A COMPREHENSIVE PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST IS WELL OVERDUE. Convened under UN auspices, it would seek to implement UN Security Council resolutions on Israel, Palestine, Lebanon and Cyprus. It would recognise that the present crisis cannot be isolated from the unresolved issues of the region as a whole.

As part of these negotiations it should be possible to

1. Work towards a democratic act of free choice in Kuwait. Let the people of Kuwait determine the kind of government they want. Let them decide whether they wish to have any association with Iraq.
2. Ensure that Iraq and other oil producing countries can obtain fair and stable prices for their oil. Some arrangement giving Iraq access to disputed oilfields and to the Persian Gulf may also be possible.
3. Institute a complete embargo on arms transfers to the Middle East.

In all of these negotiations it is the United Nations, through its Secretary-General, that should take the lead, not the United States or any other single country.

Instead of promoting military solutions, Australia should withdraw its warships and apply all its energies and influence to promote such a peace plan.

The time to act is now — before it is too late.

For further information contact Rainbow Alliance PO Box 122, Niddrie Vic 3042 (Tel. (03) 379 1185)

Suggestions for Action

We have listed a number of actions you might take, beginning with the easiest:

- * Read, photocopy and pass on the enclosed literature. Reprint it in your newsletter or journal.
- * Photocopy the enclosed greetings card and send it to acquaintances and friends, inviting them to do the same.
- * Support rallies and demonstrations.
- * Simply write a letter to the Prime Minister (Hon. R.J. Hawke) or the Minister for Foreign Affairs (Sen. Gareth Evans), Parliament House, Canberra, ACT 2600 or telephone or write to your local Member of Parliament. You may wish to use some of the ideas or quotes in the pro-forma letter. Please write it in your own words, preferably **not** on a word processor.
- * Ring Access Age (670 1601) or write to the Editor of your local newspaper.
- * Invite some friends into your home to discuss these issues.
- * If you are a member of a community organisation, church, trade union or political party, get in touch with other members, pass on information to them, and initiate whatever action is possible at this time of year.

Pro-Forma Letter

Please re-write this in your own hand-writing or on a typewriter, preferably not a word processor.

The Hon. R.J. Hawke
Prime Minister of Australia
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Hawke,

I am writing to express strongest opposition to the part being played by the Australian Government in the Gulf conflict. I believe Australia has absolutely no military role in this region and demand that Australian naval forces be returned to Australia immediately.

I understand that the present conflict is complex, especially because of the history of the Middle East. This makes the case for a non-violent resolution of this conflict even stronger. Additionally, as you know, United States military advisors are arguing that sanctions should be given time to work, even up to 18 months.

I am appalled that Australian troops are once again being sent to participate in foreign hostilities, serving other's interests. I am very disturbed that Senator Evans' public statements play down the seriousness and horror of a likely war.

I believe Australia has a constructive role to play in a peace process in the Middle East, as can be seen in Cambodia. This necessitates, however, that Australia be seen to act in the interests of all parties.

I look forward to your reply assuring me that the Australian government has decided to withdraw the ships and will work in the UN for a comprehensive settlement of outstanding conflicts in the Middle East.

Yours sincerely,