



Mansoor Hekmat

The Gory Dawn of the New World Order

US War in the Middle East



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manity will be put to shame.

This war must be stopped for the political, cultural and moral retrogression it imposes on the world as a whole. The signs are already here. Superpower military interventionism, colonial mentality, national chauvinism, racism, patriotism, religious prejudice, terrorism, and lackey journalism are some of the dark forces already unleashed by this war on both sides of the conflict. These are the real features of the so-called New World Order that is in the making.

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JUDGING by what is being done in the Gulf, and by what we are told about it by the media, we must all be thankful for the fact that this is a world of hypocrisy, selective morality and double standards. Just imagine the chaos if all United Nation resolutions were to be enforced with equal rigour and resolve. Just imagine how many thousands of tons of bombs would have to be dropped, to start with, on Israel for its occupation of Palestinian land and its treatment of the Palestinian people, on South Africa for its denial of human status to the majority of its inhabitants, and on the USA itself for uninterrupted harassment of humanity for decades. Imagine the number of fighter and bomber 'sorties' and cruise missile launches that would be required to neutralize weapons of mass destruction stockpiled in the USA, USSR, China, Britain, France, Israel and all other states with enough cash to afford them. Imagine the kind of wars which had to be waged if we were to prevent monopolistic control of not just oil, but also grain, technology, vaccines, information, etc. Just think

of the number of ships required to blockade all dictatorships; the number of judges and courtrooms needed to try all war criminals regardless of race, creed, nationality and table manners; the environmental cost of trying to tame all trigger-happy global and regional superpowers. And just think of the cost of it all - no Japan or Saudi Arabia could possibly cough up that much money. It would be a nightmare. Let it be. It is just safer as it is. Let us join the parade of self-deception and Euro-American jingoism. Let us share in the juvenile excitement of our overpaid 'objective journalists' and TV panel 'experts' over their real life computer war games.

Or perhaps not. Instead, we must free ourselves from their assumptions and justifications. We must look at the real issues involved. This war is not over democracy and dictatorship. Killing and maiming Iraqi people in their thousands and destroying their homes, schools and factories is indeed a sick way of liberating them from political oppression. The war has nothing to do with preventing oil-starvation of the West. There is no point in owning more oil if you do not intend to sell it. This war is not for upholding international law. In the light of the past record of the law enforcers themselves, from Hiroshima and Vietnam to Grenada and Nicaragua, such suggestions cannot be taken seriously.

These are not the real issues. These are exactly what they are: war propaganda. The main clues for understanding the real causes of this conflict are to be found in Bush's seemingly harmless allusions to a 'New World Order' and Saddam Hossein's rejected demand for a 'linkage' (between the future of Kuwait and the resolution of the Palestinian question).

Emerging regional forces can hope to influence their destiny through resolute action.

Some of the objectives of militant Arab nationalism have already been realized. Whatever the military outcome of the war, a dramatic change in the region to the detriment of Israel is already in progress. Improvements in US-Israeli relations, symbolized by the delivery of cash and missiles to Israel, will prove hard to sustain. The end of the war will also intensify Western, or at any rate European, pressures on Israel. Arab nationalism has already managed to force upon the West a recognition of the economic and political weight of the Arab world. Already the West has committed itself to far greater concessions on the Palestinian issue than it ever had. There have also been fringe benefits. In the Arab world, nationalism has regained the initiative from Pan-Islamism. Islam has been forced back to its secondary role in Arab politics, as a tool for mass mobilization for the essentially nationalist political action. Even in Iran, the recent conflict has helped to seal the fate of the Pan-Islamic Hezbollah faction. For Iraq, its mere survival, after having put up a respectable military resistance, would be a political, and in the long term even military, victory. US occupation of Iraq or long term American military presence in the region will definitely backfire and turn the current war into a second Vietnam for the USA, a development which is likely to lead to a split within the new Western alliance and the isolation of US from Continental Europe. Short of this, however, the position of Iraq as a leading state in the Arab world will be consolidated after the war.

The War must be Stopped

This war must be stopped first and foremost for the barbarity that it represents. It has already claimed thousands of innocent victims. The whole idea of 'surgical' bombing is a myth. A whole country is bombed to the ground. Adults and children are killed by bombs and missiles and die of lack of water, electricity, medicine and sanitation. The horrors of this war for innocent Iraqi civilians cannot be hushed up by the Western media for long. When the facts emerge, as is gradually happening, the whole hu-

population 50 times that of Israel and vast economic resources, oil and labour, could not find a correspondingly strong voice in the world economy and international politics, as long as broader global considerations tied the West to Israel.

And here is the undeniable linkage - whether or not Arab statesmen care an iota about the plight of the Palestinian people (which they generally don't), the Palestinian question has become an index of USA's and the West's attitude toward the Arab world. Israel and the Palestinian question stand in the way of full economic and political integration of the Arab world with the West. Arabs want to be with the West 'not as slaves, but as partners', says Arafat. Egypt attempted to achieve this objective by distancing itself from the Pan-Arabic cause and attempting a separate accommodation with Israel. The strategy failed. Militant nationalism hopes to achieve the same objective by show of strength. It is fighting the West in order to join it on more favourable terms. The initial occupation of Kuwait was a straightforward military act on the part of Iraq for its own national interests. For Iraq the best scenario would have been a quiet annexation without immediate regional repercussions. But once this was forcefully resisted by the West, exactly because of its real linkage with the future of Israel, and once a US military intervention against an Arab state became imminent, the aborted Iraqi act was embraced by militant Arab nationalism as a contribution to the broader regional cause.

It is not difficult to see why for Arab nationalism the field of action appears to have widened and why even a destructive war may still count as a political advance. The collapse of the Soviet bloc has undermined the strategic significance of Israel for the West. Sooner, rather than later, the economic and demographic realities in the region are bound to impose themselves on Western policy. The old political geography of the world is bound to be revised, as is already evident from developments in Europe, the Soviet Union, Yemen and Korea. Moreover, the international division of power between bourgeois states must be revised to take account of the new economic and political poles that have emerged outside the boundaries of the advanced capitalist zones as a result of post-war technological advance and internationalization of capital. The rigid balance imposed and maintained by the old East-West polarization has broken down.

The New World Order

The conflict in the Gulf is merely one manifestation of the contradictions and uncertainties in the post-Cold War international relations. With the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the old international power structure, based on the military, political and, to a lesser extent, economic, opposition of the two power blocs of East and West, also disintegrated. While the mass media and political commentators in the West rejoiced over the so-called 'collapse of communism' and promised a future of peace and harmony under the unchallenged sway of the glorious market, it was evident to anybody with a sober mind that the post-Cold War world will be ridden with serious economic, political and ideological tensions and confrontations. Western political commentary is usually focused on the volatile situation in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the so-called North-South divide, the environment, regional conflicts and so on - i.e. problems which supposedly originate outside the boundaries of the 'democratic' and 'civilised' West. These are indeed part of the problems that face the '90s, however, the main challenge, and the central issue in any attempt to shape a 'New Order', lies in the West itself. The collapse of the East meant also the demise of the West as its opposite pole, as a defined economic, political, military and ideological entity forged to contain and defeat the Soviet bloc after the Second World War. The old West, both as a concept and as a politico-economic reality, was erected on the basis of the hegemony, or the so-called 'leading role', of the United States. The preservation of this role, or even its extension, in the radically transformed world of post-Cold War politics, is the essence of the American

vision of the 'New World Order'.

Prior to the recent crisis in the Middle East, such a vision appeared to lack practical venues for self-realization. The rise of Japan and West Germany as formidable economic powers, the march towards European unity and the actual reunification of Germany, the political shift in Eastern European countries in favour of the pro-market Right and, last but not least, the political and economic opening of the Soviet Union itself to the West, undermined every aspect of the old West. Not only the leading role of the US, but even the actual institutions that embodied and safeguarded US hegemony, such as NATO, appeared to become increasingly redundant. The whole American foreign policy lost its focus. Even some of the most hawkish Cold War warriors on the extreme right of American politics turned into advocates of isolationism. The crisis in the Gulf presented the US government with an opportunity to try to reverse these trends. In a recent speech to a gathering of Religious Broadcasters, George Bush spelled out US intentions in the war with astonishing clarity. The aim was to 'restore the leadership' and 'reliability' of the United States. Once this was achieved, said Bush, international problems such as the Palestinian question, could be resolved with the US 'taking a leading role'.

The United States seized the opportunity created by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait to reassert itself as a superpower. With a massive campaign of propaganda and provocation skilfully carried out by the high-tech boot-licker journalism in the West, itself a product of mass political apathy of the 80s, a new 'Evil Empire' was created overnight. A Third World country of no more than 17 million people, indebted, totally dependent on its oil exports to the West, and worn out after eight years of war with the neighbouring Iran, was portrayed as a global menace. A regional issue that would under other circumstance be dealt with by the usual political and diplomatic pressures and gestures was blown out of all proportions into a life and death challenge for the 'civilized world'. Continental Europe hesitantly fell in line. Kohl and Mitterrand, figures of an assertive united bourgeois Europe, were pushed to the sidelines by Bush and Baker, symbols of American omnipotence. The Japanese giant was reduced to an obedient cashier. Europe was reminded of the indispensable 'leading role' of the US in the capitalist new world order.

While Iraq is the theatre of war, the central issues that are to be settled by this war lie primarily in the West. USA's show of force and 'leadership' in the Middle East is to ensure it a commanding position vis-à-vis its allies, and rivals, in the post-Cold War West; a precondition, also, for a global US supremacy. But USA's endeavour runs against the political and economic logic of the present-day capitalism, which calls for a fundamental revision of the old balance and the emergence of a new bourgeois economic and political configuration. The fragile nature of the 'Coalition', in contrast to the cohesion displayed for decades by the Western alliance in their confrontation with the Eastern bloc, underlines the historical limits of the American endeavour.

The Linkage

In the opposite trenches we find not Iraq, as a country or a political regime, but Arab nationalism as a regional force - another contestant in the struggle for shaping the New Order. This is not the old populist, anti-colonial Arab nationalism, but the banner of the post-OPEC Arab bourgeoisie. It derives its militancy not from the desperation of the Arab poor or the plight of the Palestinian people, but from the material possibilities opened to Arab bourgeois states to improve their standing in the regional and international power structure and the world economy. For long these aspirations were thwarted by the old East-West confrontation and balance. Western influence in the Middle East rested on Israel and Iran as pillars of the policy of containment of the Soviet Union. Even pro-West Arab countries, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and later Egypt, found themselves unable to affect the same level of economic and political integration with the West that was enjoyed by Israel and Iran under the Shah and was essential for capitalist development and technological advance. Moreover, long before its eventual collapse, it had already become evident that the Eastern bloc could not offer any framework for economic growth in the countries within its sphere of influence. But Arab states, with a total