

Aftermath Of A Gulf War

Establishing A New World Order

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It is now several months after the conclusion of the Gulf War. The US has staged its victory parade and fallout from the war continues to be felt, not the least by the Iraqi people, the Kurdish and the Palestinians.

Southern Kurdistan (northern Iraq), the Persian Gulf and other areas in the region now contain American troops, ships and aircraft, with a permanent military presence now being put in place. How did this come about, what was the background to the war, and why a war in the Middle East?

Prior to the beginning of the war, Luis Bilbao wrote in the Buenos Aires daily *Nuevo Sur*,

“In the show of force in the desert, one can now precisely measure abstract concepts that only months ago were nearly out of reach: a breakup of the international balance of power and a strengthening of the seven leading industrialized countries...the conflict of interest between the Big Seven and the rest of the world is merely beginning to take on its true shape.”

The background to the war can be traced to recent international developments, in particular a reconstitution of the global order. This includes not only the breakup of the Eastern Bloc in 1989 and the ending of the Cold War, but also the forming of three competing economic blocs: Europe, Japan-Asia and North America.

One can say that the East-West conflict has shifted to a North-South conflict or, as Bilbao has already said, a “conflict of interest between the Big Seven and the rest of the world”. But while it’s clear that the world economy is now subject to conditions imposed by the G-7, the Gulf War must be seen first of all as an assertion of US hegemony (a dominant leadership).

THE NEW WORLD ORDER

The restructuring of international capital, the economic competition rising from Europe and Japan-Asia, concurrent with the economic decline in the US, means the US is now capable of asserting its hegemony in an economic-political-military way.

The Persian Gulf was the proving ground of the New World Order, in essence an order led by the US which

“dominates its affairs and destiny on the international and regional levels...the US conquest of the Arabian Peninsula is part and parcel of the US global policy at this juncture. The Arabian Peninsula has 66 percent of the world’s oil resources. Oil is no longer only a source of energy, although that is important. Oil now means¹ energy;² a series of major, diversified and growing petrochemical industries; and³ control of the circulation of international finance...the US has invaded the Arabian Peninsula to retain its leading world position. By domination of Arab oil, the US dominates not only the political and economic destiny of this region, but can also determine the outcome of its fierce competition with Europe and Japan” (George Habash, the Popular Front for the liberation of Palestine (PFLP), *Democratic Palestine*, November-December, 1990).

As well, western and US imperialism has had to contend with various threats to its power in the Middle East, including the rise of Islamic fundamentalism (which can be characterized as decidedly anti-western as in the 1979 Iranian revolution), the Palestinian resistance and the Intifada (which has increasingly challenged the western imperialism asset in the region, Israel),

¹Vancouver Province, January 21, 1991.

²Ibid.

³See also *Resistance* no. 14.

Pan-Arab nationalism, and the Kurdish guerrilla struggle in NATO's southern flank, Turkey.

Combined, these factors make the region one of the most unstable in the world for western imperialism.

In this context, Iraq was another essential factor. Iraq was a major military power in the region and an oil producing country that worked against the interests of the US. Not only with the invasion of Kuwait, which was nothing more than a preconceived context for US military intervention, but through its oil policies which included raising the price of oil and limiting production, contrary to the agreements reached by OPEC and western imperialism.

The Iraqi challenge had to be dismantled to deter threats to western interests and/or to the security of the Zionist state of Israel and the pro-US Arab regimes.

The Gulf War was aimed at establishing US hegemony in the New World Order, gaining control of the Arabian Peninsula, dismantling Iraq and crushing the liberation struggles in the region.

CANADIAN INVOLVEMENT IN THE GULF WAR

Canada's military involvement in the Gulf War was, in the overall balance of forces deployed, minor. With only 2,000 troops, Canada's role was limited to providing logistical support in sea and air operations.

Despite this, it must be noted that Canada was one of the first countries—outside of the US—to respond militarily, by sending three ships to the Gulf on August 24, 1990 to enforce the economic embargo. The Canadian government also supported, with little reservation, all US-led UN resolutions against Iraq.

LIMITED MILITARY CAPABILITIES

Under Operation Friction, naval and air task groups from the Canadian Armed forces (CAF) were deployed in Saudi Arabia at Al Quaysuma and Al Jubayl; in Manama, Bahrain; Qatar; in the southern Gulf; and aboard the US Hospital ship Mercy. By January 15, the deployment consisted of the three ships, HMCS Athabaskan, Protecteur, and Terra Nova; 24 CF-18 fighters; field hospitals; and two companies of infantry for security. The role of the CAF was limited to logistical support: interdiction of cargo ships, escort of supply ships, escort of bombers and medical aid.

What may at first appear to be another facet of the world-wide myth, "Canada the peace-keeper", is in reality the extremely limited military capabilities of the CAF; only 80,000 personnel in total, outdated and overworked equipment, and a lack of desert fighting equipment and training. As well, an activation of more troops would have "placed a severe strain on the ability of the CAF to take on such tasks as responding to another Mohawk crisis at home (an unnamed source, Globe and Mail, January 12, 1990).

The Canadian military contribution was limited, but Canada's economic and political interests in the war knew no boundaries.

CANADIAN ECONOMIC INTERESTS

Canada's political and military involvement in the war was determined by economic interrelation with the US, realized through the Free Trade Agreement on one level, and international

groupings such as the G-7;

“If the war is ended quickly, Mr. Wilson (the Canadian Finance Minister) said, he agrees with US officials that an Allied victory could help improve consumer confidence and trigger a rebound in the N. American economies...All of the countries were searching for ways to make sure the recessions facing the US, Britain and Canada don’t become severe enough to trigger a global downturn” (Globe and Mail, Report on Business, January 21, 1991, a meeting of the G-7 in New York).

In the development of three competing economic blocs (Europe, Japan-Asia and N. America) Canada’s economic and political destiny now lies with that of the US. As a participant in and beneficiary of US imperialism, Canada’s interests are strongly connected with those of the US.

Militarily, Canada can contribute little to the US’s New World Order. Rather, it will be in the economic and political fields, through Canada’s position in the IMF, the G-7 and the UN, that Canada will re-affirm US imperialism’s new era of exploitation.

THE FUTURE

The New World Order will be a period of more military interventions, primarily by the US—the one nation militarily capable of such incursions—and increased exploitation of the three continents. The effects of this New World Order, the ending of the Cold War (which was greeted with such euphoria as opening to an era of “peace”) and the economic restructuring, can now be seen in the aftermath of the Gulf War.

The struggle continues.

The Gulf War & ‘Internal Security’

Throughout the course of the Gulf War and in the months leading up to it, North America and Europe experienced unprecedented levels of “internal security”. The threat of “terrorist” attacks was almost as newsworthy as the war itself. Soldiers and armored vehicles patrolled airports in Britain, SWAT teams and bomb squads were deployed at Super Bowl V in Florida, Arabs were detained, harassed and placed under surveillance. The massive security campaign had specific goals; repression of Arabs, repression of opposition to the war in general; propaganda for the war; and actual security of potential targets of resistance.

If the US and other nations had learned anything from the defeat in Vietnam, it was that wars can be significantly disrupted from internal movements. Therefore, the role of counter-insurgency, maintaining the “inner peace”, controlling dissent to ensure the ability to wage war from the military-economic centres, and mobilizing social consensus in favour of the war, was given a high priority.

THE TERRORIST HYPE

The use of “anti-terrorist” hysteria attempted to establish an image in the social consciousness of a society under siege—not only involved in a “just war” in the Persian Gulf—but under threat in its own peaceful backyard. Prior to the war, reports were already filtering through the media of “terrorist” groups in Canada. This followed the pattern of the “Libyan hit squads” of the early ’80’s and the IRA unit gunning for Thatcher at the 1988 Economic Summit in Toronto. Neither of these cases proved much substance.

Not easily discouraged, “terrorist units” appeared in the headlines on January 21, 1991: “Terrorism hits home—Canadians believed targeted by radical supporters of Iraq.”⁴ This report originated from the expulsion of three Iraqi diplomats in Ottawa. Diplomats it was later discovered, to have “had suspected links with Arab terrorist cells in Canada”. Suddenly, “terrorist cells” appeared ad nauseam: “Small cells of the Lebanese Shiite group Hezbollah had been uncovered in Toronto and Montreal...Also involved were cells of the Shiite party known as Al Da’wa. Meanwhile, terrorists linked to Iraq may be trying to infiltrate the US through Canada...it is possible we will see terrorist attacks in the coming week.”⁵

No such attacks occurred in N. America, nor were there any spectacular and “high-level” actions of the sort security officials could even attribute to Arab guerrillas (one action, six pipe-bombs found near a US naval base in Virginia turned out to be an insurance scam by three businessmen).

Undaunted by this conspicuous absence of attacks, security agencies continued with their campaign. Arabs in Canada continued to be interrogated by Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS) agents,⁶ to the point where the Canadian Arab Federation was forced to hold news conferences on the issue and distribute a brochure on CSIS. The CAF received over 60 complaints by Arabs who had been followed, questioned at length or photographed by CSIS. CSIS claimed their activities were merely to learn more about the politics of the middle East. However, such overt and aggressive surveillance techniques have less to do with information gathering and more to do with repression via intimidation. The Arab community and particularly the radical elements were to be neutralized—not because they were “potential terrorists”—but because they offered the strongest orientation of resistance, because they had the ability to expose the real goals of the war, and to provide a perspective that went beyond the “No Blood for Oil, Bring Our Troops Home” sloganeering of the anti-war movement.

THE USE OF IMMIGRATION AS CONTROL

Along with the highly publicized activities of CSIS, the use of immigration laws and refugee status was used to further silence the Arab community. Throughout N. America and Europe, Arabs and particularly Palestinians and Iraqis were detained, denied entry, had their visa’s revoked or denied extension. In the UK, Iraqi nationals were barred from entry and those already living in the UK were required to register with police. By the end of the war, up to 200 Iraqis and Palestinians had been detained. In Germany, the surveillance of Arabs and new laws against immigrants required doctors, lawyers and public officials to give the government all information they had on immigrants. In Spain, some 6,000 Arabs were “suspect” and entered into computer files under “Operation Duna”. In France, a similar program was enacted under “Vigipirate”.

In Canada, amongst other cases, was the example of an Iraqi couple arriving at Toronto’s Pearson airport allegedly carrying false Saudi passports, who were detained on January 9, 1991. The couple applied for refugee status, and the man was a member of the opposition Da’wa party and had fought on the side of Iran in the Iran-Iraq war. He was found to be carrying a notebook with a list of weapons, which he claimed he compiled during the Iran-Iraq war.

⁴Vancouver Province, January 21, 1991.

⁵Ibid.

⁶See also Resistance no. 14.

Initial government efforts to have the couple detained as security threats were overturned when immigration adjudicator Dennis Paxton ruled that the government's arguments were "to be generous, unlikely".⁷ However, his decision to order the couple released was overruled by a "national security certificate" filed by then-Immigration Minister Barbara McDougall and Solicitor-General Pierre Cadieux.

The certificate, used for the first time, is issued under section 40 of the Immigration Act if both the Immigration Minister and Solicitor-General "are of the opinion, based on security or criminal intelligence reports" that an individual poses a threat to the safety of Canada. On March 12 the Federal Court of Canada ruled the government lacked any evidence that the couple were a security threat. In his ruling, the judge stated that the couple "appeared to have a genuine refugee claim based upon their opposition to the regime of Saddam Hussein." Interestingly, the use of the couple as propaganda shifted from "potential terrorists" prior to and during the war, to refugees fleeing the Iraqi regime after the US military "victory".

A "POTENTIAL FOR SABOTAGE"

Along with the CSIS surveillance and the use of immigration laws was the actual security presence:

"A vast array of strategic facilities—everything from airports and border crossings to power plants—are on the alert...Security at nuclear plants in New Brunswick and Ontario has been strengthened."⁸

On January 15, 1991 the National Energy Board issued directives to oil and gas pipeline companies to increase security at key installations. "It's a quiet reminder of the crisis in the Persian Gulf and of the potential for sabotage."⁹

The heightened security ran from the highest levels of state agencies such as the national Security Coordination Centre down to local police forces.

In Toronto, city police met with public department heads. According to Nick Vardin, commissioner of Toronto's Public Works Department, they had a "strategic meeting with police to discuss what would be expected in the event of an emergency or terrorist attack...that we would be expected to provide manpower and any resources to help out."¹⁰

In Vancouver, Jewish Congress chairperson Dr. Michael Elterman stated his organization had "had discussions with Vancouver police and worked out a plan" in the event of "terrorist actions."¹¹

There was also a marked increase in policing of anti-war demonstrations in Vancouver with higher numbers of police including the use of riot-equipped police on the international protest day of January 26 (this occurred after demonstrators assailed a militia armory, destroyed recruiting signs and proceeded to a recruiting center, presumably to do similar actions). In other demonstrations when more radical demonstrators blocked streets in downtown Vancouver to further disrupt traffic and "business as usual", the police were quick to point out that the people involved were "fringe groups" and that the police "knew who they were and were keeping an

⁷Globe and Mail, February 6, 1991.

⁸Globe and Mail, January 12, 1991.

⁹Globe and Mail, Report on Business, January 15, 1991.

¹⁰Globe and Mail, January 18, 1991.

¹¹Vancouver Province, January 22, 1991.

eye on them”.

THE EMERGENCIES ACT

The final phase of such security would have been enactment of the Emergencies Act, requiring only a simple declaration by the federal cabinet. The Emergencies Act, which replaced the War Measures Act in 1988, contains all the necessary instruments to launch an internal war on “dissent”.¹² Under the Act, a “war emergency” can be declared which is a “war or other armed conflict, real or imminent, involving Canada or any of its allies that is so serious as to be a national emergency”. With this, the government can make any “orders or regulations” that it believes “on reasonable grounds, are necessary or advisable”. Another aspect of the Act is the “international emergency”, which enables the government to regulate “any specified industry or services” and control the travel of any Canadian citizen. In this way, any substantial increase in resistance, such as workers strikes involving military equipment or armaments, widespread sabotage, could prompt implementation of the Emergencies Act.

SOMETHING WAS MISSING!

But where was this wave of “terrorism”? Certainly, armed attacks occurred in many countries throughout the world—but even counter-insurgency “experts” claimed it wasn’t from Iraqi or Palestinian groups but in fact endemic (local) guerrilla groups. Even with this, the offensive of armed actions was primarily in the Three Continents and relatively limited in the major western states.

According to Yigal Carmon, adviser on “terrorism” to Israeli prime minister Yitzak Shamir, this was due to the increased vigilance in the west:

“Carmon noted western countries had taken an unprecedented range of countermeasures to detect and deter terrorism...Among other measures, maintenance workers and cleaners of Arab origin were dismissed from jobs in European airports, government buildings and military installations. Asked if such dismissals violated civil rights, Carmon said he assumed such measures were all legal because the countries concerned were all law-abiding (!!!-ed.). He pointed with approval to western countries that have ‘investigated and restricted the movements of Arab nationals and have detained and deported them.’”¹³

However, the reality of this “vigilance” in deterring armed attacks can be seen in the actions which did take place: the Red Army Fraction machine-gunning of the US embassy in Bonn, bombings by the November 17 organization in Greece, bombings throughout Turkey, scores of fire-bombings of military recruiting centres, corporations and US interests throughout the US and W. Europe, and most striking of all, the February 7 IRA mortar attack on No. 10 Downing St.—the very nerve centre of the British government—while the prime minister met with his war cabinet!

Clearly, when radical groups have the ability and determination to carry out attacks, any level of security can be breached or avoided.

The actual security of targets is in many ways a side-effect of the ultimate goals. That is, while security of military, government and corporate property is of importance (more so in the Three

¹²Enacted in October 1970 during the FLQ “October Crisis”.

¹³Globe and Mail, February 14, 1991.

Continents), such security also has political goals aimed at a level of social control that goes beyond more guards and razor-wire. The guards and razor-wire are necessary, but they are used to also mobilize people into acceptance and even support for the military force used against Iraq, and de facto Arab people, because not only is there a war “over there” but also an “inner threat” here. The crudest manifestations of this social control politics was the upsurge in racist violence against Arab people. Vandalism, assaults, firebombings and even shootings occurred. The Canadian Arab Federation documented over 100 violent anti-Arab incidents. Another effect of the racist war hysteria was an increase in anti-semitic attacks on synagogues, Jewish schools and businesses. Clearly, many of these actions can be attributed to the extreme right/fascist groups who, if they weren’t fully supporting the war, were railing against the war as yet another “Jewish conspiracy to rule the world”, such as Tom Metzger’s White Aryan Resistance, which instructed its members not to fight for “Jews or camel-jockeys and sand-niggers”.

RACISM IN THE ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT

The response in much of the anti-war movement to this racism was to reinforce it. Aside from other critiques of the anti-war movement, such as its lack of clear analysis as to how to resist the war, its sexism and lack of class consciousness, was its own racism.

Seemingly unable and/or unwilling to go beyond slogans and perspectives of the 60’s, or more correctly the media image of that movement, anti-war opposition relied on opportunistic slogans: Bring Our/The Troops Home (to which one must ask why—to suppress another Oka or enforce Martial law?), and No Blood for Oil (to which one must ask, whose blood—white Anglo-Saxons’ blood?). The movement in general played up to white supremacy and patriotism as it attempted to depoliticize every aspect of imperialist war except self-interest: Hell No, We Won’t Go, We Won’t Die For Texaco. What mattered most to the “official” peace movement was the numbers of people it could attract to demonstrations and vigils where its sacred rituals of pseudo-dissent were enacted like a broken record. A broken John Lennon record!

But at whose expense?

The failure to link the Palestinian and Kurdish struggles with the war, to analyze the economic and political conditions which have ensured there has not been one day of peace since World War 2, the absence of an attempt to develop a perspective for resistance to the war and not just protest, meant that the anti-war movement was circumscribed. It had come to a dead end even before it started. Who was absent from its programs and platforms: people of colour and particularly Arabs. The crystallization of this process was the Jan. 26 mobilizations in which the Vancouver “disarmament” group End the Arms Race refused to allow a member of the Arab community to speak on a platform they controlled. Allegedly to avoid “controversy”, it was yet another attempt to retain the depoliticization EAR had worked so hard to achieve, and in the end can only be seen as furthering the efforts by the state to silence the Arab perspective: collaboration is the definitive term.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the use of “anti-terrorism” and security plays a special role in social control. It creates the conditions for selective and if necessary widespread repression. In this way, the

argument that armed or militant actions create repression is shown to be an absurdity; the state constantly organizes its repressive laws and apparatus and constructs the necessary conditions to implement them.

However, it isn't only counter-insurgency that can weaken or even destroy oppositional movements. Nor is it the state which is solely responsible for widespread racism, or in the context of the Gulf War, attacks against Arabs and support for the wholesale slaughter of Arabs. This is something the "peace" movement can also lay claim to.

In this way, the question must also be asked: what role does false opposition play in social control? Certainly, as long as movements of opposition do not attack causes and instead rally around effects, and do not direct themselves against the determining point of conflict between the exploited and exploiter, they fulfill the role of reaffirming the "pluralistic democracy" by acting as the (false) voice of dissent.

Above all, the security measures taken during the Gulf War need to be understood and, in future conflicts as well as now, countered by breaking through the limitations imposed by the state and the "official" peace movement. Limitations not only in our analysis, but in our actions and solidarity work.

FOOTNOTES;

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