

Future Of The Middle East

Turbulent Peace

The Gulf crisis was well into the war phase before much thought was given to the postwar Middle East settlement. **George Joffe** views whatever might emerge with pessimism

Now we know what the political masters of the multinational force in the Gulf intend to do with the Middle East, once the war with Iraq is over and the Saddam Hussein regime, along with its creator, has been eliminated. The details are still missing, but the main outlines are becoming clear as United States and European statesmen make their pronouncements and tour the capitals of their Middle Eastern allies in an atmosphere of ever greater confidence. In effect, Washington seems to want to retain a cohesive 'Western' view, in which the United States and Europe are seen to act in concert, even though the cold war has formally ended. Although there is no doubt that this view is supported in London – which tends to see the West in terms of an Anglo-Saxon axis and the 'special relationship' between Britain and the United States – France has reservations and it is clearly not shared by southern European nations. As Hurd discovered to his discomfort in early February, Anglo-American ideas over future Middle East security arrangements are considered too timid in Rome, where the preferred Italo-Spanish option is a Mediterranean version of the CSCE (Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe).

The Anglo-American axis might also face problems from the Soviet Union, despite Gorbachev's massive domestic difficulties. Soviet support for UN Security Council Resolution 679 was, after all, predicated on the assumption of Soviet participation in future Middle East security arrangements. Not only does Moscow have a long-standing relationship with Baghdad, but the Middle East is uncomfortably close to its Muslim southern republics. Unfortunately, cold war traditions appeared to die hard and neither Douglas Hurd nor James Baker seem to have 'factored in' a Soviet component for their proposals.

The general lines of what is proposed by Britain and the United States now seem fairly clear. Hurd argues that the Arab world itself must create this new system (presumably under Western tutelage) and a conference to this effect between eight of the nine partners in the alliance (Morocco being the sole absentee) occurred in Cairo in mid-February. There are basically four elements to the proposal:

1. There is to be a new security system, based on the Arab world in one form or another. Hurd's preferred option appears to be based on the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) – the organisation created in 1981 in order to provide the Gulf with a collective security system designed to obviate the necessity for Iraqi, Iranian or even Western participation and involving Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, Oman and Saudi Arabia – but this time under explicit Saudi leadership. The military component would be provided by Egypt, or even Syria, with the GCC meeting the costs. Western air and naval forces would maintain an 'over-the-horizon' presence, although arms dumps and even some aircraft might be based in forward areas, such as Kuwait.

2. There is also to be an initiative towards regional disarmament and towards limiting future arms supplies to the region. Disarmament would involve the removal of nuclear, bacteriological and chemical weapons, while arms supply controls would exclude 'non-conventional' arms.

3. Attempts are to be made to resolve the Arab-Israeli dispute, together with the Palestinian issue. According to comments made by Hurd, this might not necessarily involve the PLO as a negotiating partner and Israel would not be forced to attend a peace conference or to accept an independent Palestinian state as part of any ultimate solution.

4. Finally, arrangements are to be created to redistribute wealth in the

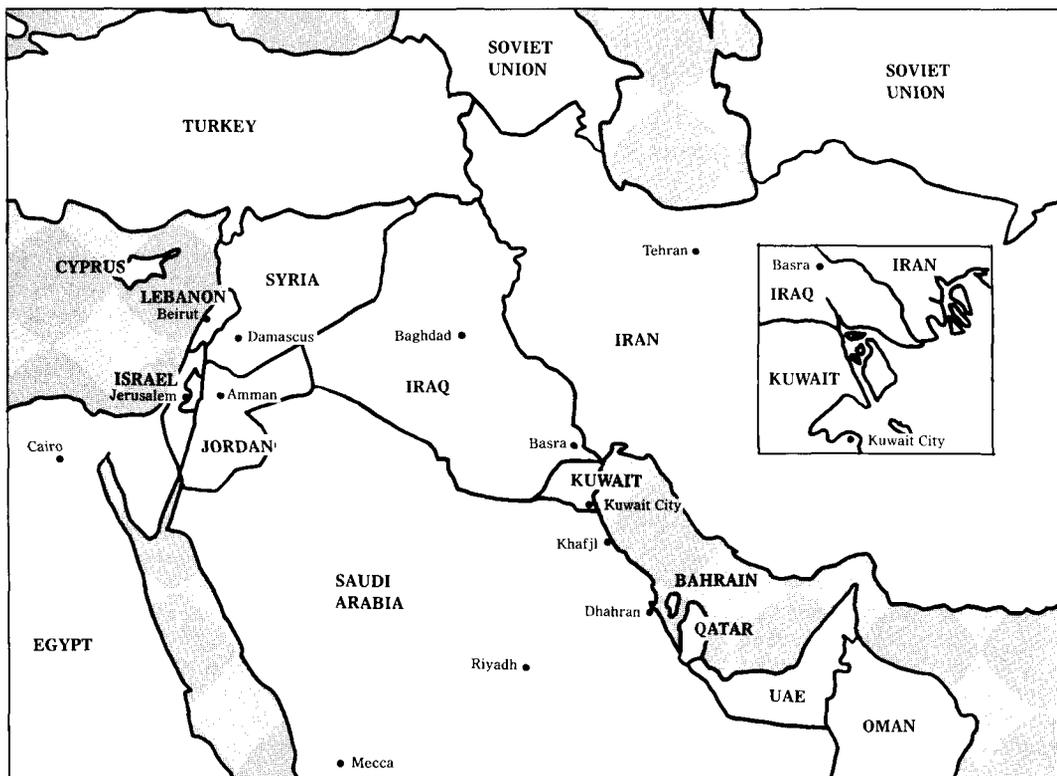
region. This would involve significant funds being made available by the GCC states, in addition to the military costs they will have to bear. Western help – from Japan and Germany – might also be involved.

Baker also proposed that there should be a regional development bank, rather like the new BERD which is to stimulate capitalist reconstruction in Eastern Europe, to contribute towards the fourth objective. The European Community, for its part, wants to extend its existing aid agreements to cover Libya, Iran and even a postwar Iraq. In effect, these new arrangements are both to pay for the reconstruction of Iraq and Kuwait after the war and to provide a mechanism to redistribute Gulf oil wealth throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

It all sounds very optimistic. It even seems to justify the way in which the United Nations has been hijacked by the United States and Britain to legitimise their decision to eliminate the Saddam Hussein regime. It is certainly designed to excuse the physical destruction of Iraq – an inevitable consequence of the type of war that the allies in the multinational force have decided to fight. The problem is, however, that all these proposals are, as one commentator on Baker's testimony pointed out, '... high on moral content, but low on detail'. In any case, many Western states have serious reservations about them, preferring instead arrangements which actually link the Middle East and Europe together and which will involve real changes in Western attitudes towards regional problems. Furthermore, despite Hurd's fervent belief that security arrangements must originate from within the Arab world itself, his own hints of what they should be (which no Arab leader is likely to ignore) seem to run counter to the practical realities of the world in which they are to be applied.

One reason for this is that the underlying causes for the West's concern over the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and for Washington's original involvement have little to do with the security system it now wishes to see created. There seem to have been two principal concerns. The first was Western (namely, the OECD states) dependence on oil imports from the Gulf. The Middle East – in effect, the Gulf – contains 66.3% of the world's oil reserves. The US imports 45% of the oil it consumes, 26% of it from the Gulf. Western Europe imports 67% of the oil it consumes, 49% of it from the Gulf. Kuwait and Iraq together contain 29% of the Gulf's oil reserves and, up to 1990, were producing 27% of the Gulf's total output.

Western policy-makers, particularly those in Washington and London, were not so concerned with the question of controlling access to the Gulf's oil reserves. After all, oil has little value if it cannot be produced and sold. What was important, however, was the danger that an unpredictable politician, poten-



tially hostile to Western interests, might well have manipulated oil flows in order to control crude oil prices. Such control over world oil prices could have had very unpleasant effects on the economies of the developed world, turning the danger of global or regional recession into a chronic threat. The West, therefore, had an acute interest in ensuring stability of oil supply and making sure that leaders such as Saddam Hussein could not affect it.

In fact, the second objective of the US-led intervention in the crisis has turned out to be the real concern. This was to establish the new pattern of global authority in the post-cold war world – under the aegis of the United States, with or without the cloak of United Nations sanction. It was the culmination of the US strategic conceptualisation which had begun in 1981, as President Reagan came to power. It had found its first practical test in United States hostility towards Libya in 1986 and was developed further during the United States intervention in the maritime conflict in the Gulf on behalf of Kuwait in 1987. Its first post-cold war opportunity had been President Bush's occupation of Panama in December 1989. It was a vision which had been enthusiastically supported by the Thatcher government in London.

In this context, the current post-war peace proposals now being advanced in Western capitals are merely the icing on the global security cake. The basic concern has been to demonstrate that regimes, such as that in Iraq, can no longer threaten this new dispensation of global power. The new system is to be sustained by a single super-power which, even if officially bankrupt, can still call on the financial resources of its wealthy clients and allies to support its global

'Israel is to become the key to Middle East security once again because of the unreliability of the Arab states'



security activities. It is, in effect, a restatement of the neo-imperialist security vision of the 1950s. Rather than accepting the idea of a new world order based on the community of nations as expressed through the United Nations, security is to be expressed through a series of Western-dominated collective security structures. As with Nato, the interlocking lynchpins between these new structures will be provided by the participation or the patronage of the United States and its allies.

Interestingly enough, the United States is very loath to give up Nato, despite the end of the cold war, arguing instead that Nato can have an 'out-of-area' role, including the Mediterranean and the Middle East. It is a reluctance that already had very interesting echoes for the Middle East, even before the current crisis broke out. Furthermore, United States Secretary of State James Baker's first proposal for the postwar organisation of Gulf security was the 'Gulfo' concept. This was to be a regional security organisation based on the GCC, together with a Western military input or participation.

In the case of the Middle East, however, Hurd's proposed new system will almost certainly be unworkable because it suffers from a set of internal contradictions. It also does not correspond to the fundamental assumptions on which the new security systems should be based, for essential elements which would guarantee security are apparently to be excluded. It is based on a selected group of Arab states – although the non-Arab states in the region are potentially the most powerful and have always displayed a powerful awareness of their regional role. It also ignores the way in which Western states, particularly the United States, have for years ignored the real causes of secur-

ity and stability problems in the Middle East – the Arab-Israeli dispute, together with the Palestinian issue, and the illegitimacy of the vast majority of Arab regimes which is the real cause of the repression they practice to ensure their survival.

Behind Hurd's selection of a specific group of Arab states is the assumption that the Arab world as a whole can be ignored, since only part of it has any role to play in security in future. That group is not only the group which has supported the US-led intervention against Iraq, it is also the group which effectively controls Gulf oil production and Opec. It has already demonstrated its willingness to serve Western objectives by more than compensating for oil production lost as a result of the UN embargo on exports from Iraq and Kuwait – with the result that international oil prices despite the war remain low and are predicted to fall to new lows of between \$11 and \$15 per barrel after the war.

The view that the attitudes of Arab states are irrelevant to future security arrangements unless they coincide with Western prejudice – has been reinforced by the destruction of the Arab League early last August. This was the real consequence of the tumultuous meetings at which Saudi Arabia and Egypt, at US urging, steamrolled through motions to support military participation in the US-led force in Saudi Arabia. The Arab world has now broken up into three separate components and it is difficult to see how they can be reassembled. This must have serious implications for the viability of Hurd's ideas, for the resulting tensions between states are bound to threaten their long-term security.

The Arab security core

The Arabian peninsula, unified within the GCC and its support for the multinational force and the core for the proposed new security arrangements, now confronts a fragmented Levant and an increasingly hostile North Africa. Syria and Egypt have supported the multinational force. Syria's decision results from \$2 billion worth of Saudi aid and guarantees of a free hand in Lebanon, as well as because of its traditional enmity towards Iraq. Egypt has joined in because of its dependence on United States aid and good will and because of its distaste for Iraq's bid for Arab leadership. Jordan has consistently opposed the military option, despite its reluctant support for sanctions against Iraq.

Hurd's new security system is to be based on the GCC, which will provide financial support under Saudi leadership, with Egyptian or Syrian military muscle. Yet, in the eyes of most Arabs, Saudi Arabia has disqualified itself from leadership of the fragmented Arab world precisely because of its alliance with the United States. Furthermore, if the GCC is to provide the financial support for security, it is difficult to



see how it could do the same for 'reconstruction and redistribution', as suggested by Baker – massive though oil revenues may be, they do have limits.

In addition, Egypt and Syria seem most uncertain partners because of their own internal political problems. Yet, Hurd's suggestions implicitly assume that both states are stable political entities – which they are not. Instead, the governments of both – like all other governments in the Middle East – survive to a greater or lesser degree by simple repression. Syria has massive internal problems and most observers consider that apparent domestic calm has been bought only at the cost of severe repression of popular opposition to the country's participation in the war.

Egypt, despite the enthusiasm of its government for the role proposed for it, is hardly a secure military partner. Even though it has been able to obtain relief for \$16 billion-worth of foreign debt as a result of its participation in the multinational force, it still has \$35 billion of remaining debt to contend with and an annual revenue shortfall of around \$7 billion caused by the conflict. This consists of lost remittances, tourist earnings and Suez Canal income, together with massive resettlement costs for returning migrant workers. It also has to face the threat of potential domestic unrest as the IMF structural economic reform programme it has adopted begins to bite. There is also the growing opposition to the war, which will be fuelled by casualties and by worsening domestic economic conditions.

The role of non-Arab powers

In any case, even the GCC itself recognises that such a defence structure will be inadequate – at least as far as the Gulf is concerned. At the annual GCC head-of-state summit in Dona at the end of December it was agreed (despite Saudi misgivings) that any new security system for the Gulf would have to involve Iran. Yet the West still seems determined to exclude Iran from regional security, no doubt because of United States irritation with the humiliation visited upon it during the Gulf war by the Islamic republic. Equally, the rhetoric from Tehran, which still persists in identifying the United States as the Great Satan, despite President Rafsanjani's calls for Iraq to leave Kuwait, seems bound to sustain United States hostility.

Iran, however, is one of the most populous states in the Middle East, and occupies a dominant role in the Gulf region. It cannot be excluded from regional security arrangements if stability is to be achieved in oil flows from Gulf oil producers. Western strategists will have to redraw their plans to include Iran as a key component in a new security structure, however great Saudi resistance or United States distaste to this may be. Western failure to respond to this will only intensify the power of the radicals in Tehran and worsen the prospects of security in the Gulf if Iran

is excluded from what it sees as its rightful place.

The same is not so true of the West's other non-Arab ally, Turkey, which some have seen as a potential guardian of the Levant. President Ozal's sudden interest in supporting the objectives of the multinational force (against growing domestic opposition) reflects much more parochial concerns. Turkey's primary interest is in gaining access to the European Community and Ankara believes that support for the West in the Gulf will hasten the day when Brussels will have to admit, albeit reluctantly, its first Muslim partner. There are also the longstanding Turkish objectives of resolving the Cyprus conflict to its advantage and of forcing the United States to reduce military support for its regional adversary, Greece.

There is certainly a continuing interest in Ankara in irredentist Turkish claims on Kirkuk and Mosul in northern Iraq, which are in the homeland of Iraq's 5m Kurds and which are also the centre of Iraq's northern oil fields. Interestingly enough in this connection, the Turkish government has suddenly permitted the use of Kurdish language, thereby reversing it decades-long refusal to recognise the existence of its own 11m-strong Kurdish minority. Should Iraq fall apart, Turkey may well consider annexing the Kurdish north, along with its valuable oil.

Iran would strongly oppose such a move, despite its concerns over the Shi'a south of Iraq, in part because of its anxieties over its own minorities and in part because of the danger of the consequent 'Lebanonisation' of Iraq, with the threat of continued Western involvement. Tehran might well, in such circumstances, support a rump Iraqi state against Turkey – even with Saddam Hussein still in charge. The West, therefore, must do all it can to ensure that Turkey's interests are diverted northwards and that a unitary Iraqi state survives the war. In effect, however, it cannot continue to exclude non-Arab states from the security arrangements it hopes to create.

The question of Israel

This is particularly true of the future role and status of Israel. However, discussions on this issue seem to be dominated by an inherent unrealism. On the one hand, hints are provided that the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian issue will be resolved as part of any new security system. On the other, Israel has been assured by Washington that its neutrality in the conflict will be rewarded afterwards. Although the Bush administration has already earned a reputation as the most hostile United States administration towards Zionist aspirations (as expressed in the Likud government of Yitzak Shamir in Jerusalem), the latter assurances must worry Arab states involved in the West's new plans. It is no doubt for this reason that the Syrian foreign minister, Farouk al-

Shara, has gone out of his way to emphasise that continued Syrian support depends on the way in which the West responds to what Syria perceives to be the fundamental problem of Middle Eastern security – the Arab-Israeli dispute and the Palestinian issue.

However, despite all the rhetoric, the West, particularly the US, has little intrinsic interest in resolutions that would be acceptable to the Arab world – which it, in any case, persists in considering as virtually irrelevant to future security arrangements. Israel is, in the last resort, the basic guarantor of Western interests in the region, not least because its own national interest and those of the West largely coincide. Israel will not be forced to attend a Middle East peace conference over the Palestinian issue after the war is over if it does not want to – and it certainly does not.

Western politicians have repeatedly made it clear that the PLO is unlikely to be allowed to represent Palestinian interests because of its supposed support for the Saddam Hussein regime. New Palestinian representatives must be found, even though the PLO still enjoys overwhelming majority support. Presumably Hurd and Baker do not mean by this that Hamas, the Gaza-based fundamentalist movement dedicated to destroying Israel (unlike the PLO), should take up the official torch of Palestinian independence!

The president of the European Community has even argued that Israel's objections to a peace conference could be accommodated by accepting the alternative of bilateral negotiations between Israel and its Arab neighbours. That proposal is also the preferred option of Israel's Likud coalition government – as Levy, the Israeli foreign minister, made clear on a recent visit to Washington. The Palestinians, meanwhile, are to be fobbed off with a degree of internal autonomy – as was proposed in the original Camp David agreements of 1978, brokered by Jimmy Carter, between Israeli premier Menachim Begin and the Egyptian president, Anwar Sadat. The only alternative would be that Jordan disintegrates under the pressure of military action and popular hostility towards the war. Then the 'transfer' of the Palestinian population out of the Occupied Territories into what remains of Jordan – the option preferred by Ariel Sharon and the Mofdet Party – could become a reality, thus leaving plenty of space to the expected 1m refugees from the USSR.

In effect, the reality will be that Israel is to become the key to Middle Eastern security once again because of the unreliability of Arab states, particularly in the Levant. It is notable that no Western politician has yet proposed that Israeli nuclear weapons should be included in the regional disarmament negotiations that will neuter the military power of states such as Syria and Iran and ensure that Iraq cannot become a new military phoenix. Instead,

'Until Arab regimes become acceptable to the populations over which they will continue to be unstable, repressive and no basis for effective collective security'



Saddam's Support

Historians will doubtless record how it was that, in August 1990, Western intervention in the Gulf region started a process which turned Saddam Hussein from a dictator universally feared and hated by the Arabs into a hero and symbol of Arab courage and defiance, to be venerated for generations to come. His increasing tide of support from the populations of the Arab and wider Muslim world has puzzled Western observers, some of whom had actually believed that the Arabs might be only too glad to be rid of him with Western help.

The massive demonstrations against the war in several Arab and Muslim countries since the war started should have dispelled this illusion. North Africa has been in the forefront of these protests. On January 18, 400,000 people demonstrated in Algiers. On January 25 Moroccan trade unions held a 24-hour general strike in support of Iraq with official sanction, despite the riots that had taken place on the occasion of a previous strike last December. On February 3, some 300,000 people marched through the Moroccan capital, Rabat, in the biggest demonstration there since independence in 1956. Three quarters of a million people – one quarter of the entire population of Colonel Gaddafi's Jamahiriyah – demonstrated in Tripoli on January 18 and there have been mass demonstrations in support of Iraq in Tunis ever since late August last year.

There have been similar events in the Middle East as well. In Jordan, there have been repeated anti-war and pro-Saddam demonstrations. Many Jordanians have also volunteered to fight for Iraq. In Syria, special forces were moved into every major town soon after the onset of war with orders to shoot to prevent further demonstrations after a few spontaneous outbursts of public protest occurred in the east of the country. Even in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, there have been anti-war sermons in mosques, and growing anti-war sentiment in the Egyptian opposition press.

This wave of opposition has been echoed in Muslim and Third World countries. The Pakistani capital was recently placed under daily curfew because of the danger of pro-Iraqi riots. India's 100m Mus-



lim population has reacted with widespread demonstrations in support of Saddam Hussein, and there have been similar large-scale protests in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Bangladesh.

Passive popular support for Iraq has been expressed in Africa and throughout Latin America. In Nigeria, Saddam Hussein was voted the most popular man of 1990. In Nicaragua, it is reported that many male babies born since the beginning of this year have been named either Saddam or Hussein. It may seem trivial, but it demonstrates the depth of feeling released by the events in the Middle East.

The most striking support for Saddam Hussein has probably come from the Palestinian population of the Israeli-occupied territories. Demonstrators have pledged themselves to fight alongside Iraq, and, despite a ferocious 22-hour curfew imposed on them by Israel since January 17, many Palestinians were so elated by Iraqi Scud attacks on Israel that they climbed onto their roof tops to cheer as the Iraqi missiles whizzed past. The extent of this popular support is all the more remarkable, given the devastating economic and political damage inflicted on Palestinians as a result of the Gulf crisis.

The fact that there are Arabs in the anti-Iraq coalition is often adduced by supporters of that coalition as evidence of Arab approval of the war. That, however, is to ignore the reality of Arab politics, where governments are unrepresentative of popular will, and many have long functioned as clients for Western interests in the region. There is little doubt that the formal alliance of

some Arab states with Western forces in the Gulf in no way reflects the sentiments of their populations. Although this is probably not true of the populations of the Gulf states, who have long felt directly threatened by Iraq, it is certainly true of Syria and Egypt.

Arabs who apparently support Saddam Hussein genuinely disapprove of his monstrous record in office, but they admire his defiance towards the West and Israel. There is no suggestion here that anyone in the Arab world other than a fanatical fringe seriously expects that his leadership could resolve the region's difficulties.

But in Arab eyes, Western action over the Gulf crisis since August 1990 is merely a renewal of US and British imperialism. The assault on Baghdad at the outset of war confirmed this view and served to unite widespread Arab anti-Western, particularly anti-American feeling.

Conversely, support for Saddam Hussein has also become a symbol for this anti-Americanism, and is almost certainly at the root of Third World, especially Latin American, sentiment. For Arabs and Muslims, a whole history of humiliation at Western hands lies behind their approval of Saddam's defiant stand. Not since the days of Nasser have they felt any self-respect. Here now is an Arab leader who has shown himself to be capable not only of standing up to the mightiest military force in the world, but also of retaliating.

Arabs note with pride that the Western objective of an easy victory over Iraq in a short 'surgical' war seems to have been confounded. They dis-

miss US claims that the war is 'going to plan', noting only that the multi-national force is four weeks into a war which shows no likelihood of ending soon at the time of writing.

For the Palestinians of the Occupied Territories, enthusiasm for Saddam has grown out of increasing despair. For them, as for many Arabs, Israel and America are one. American disinterest in their fate has meant the stalling of negotiations with the PLO towards a settlement and the apparently indefinite toleration by the West of their ill-treatment at Israeli hands. In Saddam they see a strong leader who, for once, puts into action what he promises. They see Israel as the root cause of the problems of the whole region, and many believe that this is, in any case, a proxy war fought by the United States on behalf of Israel. Iraq was the only Arab state capable of challenging Israel's military hegemony over the Middle East, therefore Iraq's military power had to be destroyed in order to restore the status quo. The promptness with which the US rejected Iraq's February 15 offer, widely seen in the Arab world as a genuine peace initiative, can only serve to confirm this view.

The ferment of support for Saddam Hussein, which has now even spread into Britain's own Muslim communities, has several components. Top of the list come anti-imperialism and anti-Americanism. Both derive from a deep sense of grievance and resentment against those Western powers led by the United States which are seen to have carved up the world for their own convenience. Saddam is seen as the Third World leader who dared to challenge the established order imposed by the West, and for that he must be punished and his country destroyed.

This, they believe, is the lesson which other Third World figures contemplating similar action are meant to learn. But it may be that there is a lesson here for the West as well. Ultimately, oppression will go too far and the whole artificial fabric of the familiar world order – which Muslims believe this war is designed to preserve – will be threatened. This may be the real meaning of their support for Iraq and Saddam Hussein.●

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the United States is considering additional aid of \$10 billion to help resettle the Soviet refugees and \$3.2 billion for Israeli rearmament.

Popular response and democracy

Although some of the West's Arab partners have hinted that they might be able to live with this and that a settlement of the Arab-Israeli dispute and the Palestinian issue is no longer at the top of the Arab agenda, this is unlikely to hold true for long. It is certainly not true of Arab public opinion which has long ago accepted the 'linkage' that Washington has been at such pains to discount. Arab public opinion, however, is not considered in Washington or London to have any role to play. Indeed, this refusal to even recognise that the populations of the Arab world do have a role to play in establishing the future stability of the Middle East and North Africa typifies the current state of Western strategic thinking over the region.

In effect, the proposals discussed above take no account at all of popular sentiment. Instead, the regimes which continue to rule by repression because they generally lack any popular legitimacy are to become the jewels in the new Western security crown. No doubt, they - particularly the Gulf states - will be kept in power by Western arms, if popular unrest should threaten their survival, whatever Western hopes for immediate military withdrawal at the end of current hostilities might have

been. Yet, one of the catchwords that has been widely heard in Washington and elsewhere during the run up to the war has been the need to create a democratic environment in the Middle East after the war is over. That must also imply that Western politicians recognise the vital contribution that popular support and sanction would have for legitimising the new security proposals now on the table and thereby ensuring that they would be effective.

Apart from the GCC states, where public opinion has been generally conditioned by fear of Iraq, Arab reactions to the war and to Western proposals for security have been virtually unanimously hostile. The hostility has accentuated as hostilities have progressed. Even in Saudi Arabia there has been growing antagonism to the presence of non-Muslim forces there and to the war. Reaction in the wider Muslim world and throughout the South has been similar - in Pakistan, for example, curfews are in force and the military leadership has condemned Pakistan's support for the multi-national force.

Yet regimes in the Arab world, like governments elsewhere, ultimately depend on popular toleration rather than simple repression to maintain themselves in power. They will eventually be forced to adjust their attitudes towards regional security to allow for popular attitudes, rather than for Western pre-

ference, or face dangerous domestic unrest and a radical intensification of Islamism and Arab nationalism. In effect, Western attempts to create a security system which does not take this into account cannot anticipate a long-term future. After all, it was attempted in the mid-1950s with the creation of the Baghdad pact - and that led to the collapse of the pro-Western Hashimite monarchy in Iraq, the event from which, ultimately, the Saddam Hussein regime sprang.

Western politicians do not seem to have learned any lesson from these events, particularly not the fact that, until Arab regimes become acceptable to the populations over which they rule, they will continue to be unstable, repressive and no basis for effective collective security. Ironically enough, some states, such as Jordan, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, have begun the painful process of establishing limited democratic structures, but they do not necessarily accept Western views of what security in the Middle East and North Africa should be. And that bodes ill for future stability; after all, King Hussein of Jordan has bowed to popular pressure during the past six months in opposing war and has only earned Western enmity for his democratic behaviour!●

George Joffe works at the school of Oriental and African studies, London University

'Arab public opinion is not considered in Washington or London to have any role to play'



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The British Debate

Playing The War Game

Sarah Benton explains why Britain is so keen on going to war

Britain has played no significant role in international affairs for 30 years. We assume that this is because it has not known what role to play. We have been mesmerised by Dean Acheson saying that having lost an empire, Britain has not yet found a role. But the problem is not that Britain has lost its empire. It is that it has lost its nationhood. Without that, it cannot have an international role. To be a nation, said Ernest Renan, one of its great modern theorists, the individuals who make it up must have forgotten many things. In particular, they must have forgotten the acts of violence through which it came into being; and to be a nation, its inhabitants have to have a will to be a nation.

The coming into being over the last 30 years of the political communities of Scotland, Wales, women, Afro-Caribbeans, Asians, Muslims, – each of these is premised on a freshly 'discovered' history of violence. To stay in existence, each of these communities must constantly remind us and themselves, of the violence through which they were subjugated in the first place. This is why 'the Irish never forget', why black history starts with slavery, why feminism constantly returns to male vio-