

GULF WAR & GLOBAL DYNAMICS

DAYAN JAYATILLEKA

Dayan Jayatileka is a political scientist and a former Fulbright scholarship holder. He is the associate editor of the Lanka Guardian.

Q: The Gulf War finally began today with the US air attack on Iraq. What would be the political consequences of this war on the Middle East in particular and also on the Third World?

A: This war has been described as a mini World War – not in the sense that it involves most of the countries of the world as protagonists but because of its world wide consequences, particularly the economic and ecological consequences. I will go further to say that this war is global in character because the dynamics it unleashes are truly global. This war will affect global processes and global structures. It will affect contradictions on a world scale. Therefore it would be an exaggeration to say that this war will affect world history.

What is this war about? The political economy of the war has been discussed by analysts with special reference to oil. This is certainly valid, but this emphasis on political economy must not obscure another level of reality. Imperialism after all is not only an economic phenomenon. Mr. Bush has made it clear on several occasions that in his view what is at stake is the shape of the post Cold War world. He says this war is about a New World Order. And in that he is correct, but unfortunately most of us have not understood that that precisely is the issue.

Reasserting US hegemony

What is this World Order that Mr. Bush is talking about and is seeking to achieve? How will that World Order be affected by this war? It is fairly plain that the new structure that Mr. Bush envisages is one of a renewed American hegemony over the world system. This is the zenith of the attempt by the United States to recover

and reassert its hegemony which was shattered by the victory of the Vietnamese Revolution in 1975. The United States hegemony over the post world war II World, already established in the '40s through the BrettenWoods Agreement and through a full series of multi lateral military pacts, was dramatically shaken, even ruptured, by the glorious and historic Tet offensive of 1968. The end of U.S. hegemony took place in the latter half of the 1970's. Since then the United States has been engaged in an effort to regain that hegemony. Under Jimmy Carter it laid the basis for 'moral-ethical' hegemony i.e. ideological hegemony using the Human Rights issue. This was followed in the last years of the Carter Presidency in 1979 by the decision to deploy Cruise and Pershing missiles and then by the whole Reaganite global counter revolutionary project. What President Bush seeks to do is, (to use one of his own phrases) to "go that extra mile" to guarantee the United States imperial hegemony over the post Cold War world. That is what this war is all about and it is in that perspective that the peoples of the Third World, of the tricontinental world of Asia, Africa and Latin America, should view and understand and respond to this American action.

Will President Bush's dream come true? Will the United States project be fulfilled through this particular action in the Gulf? I think not. One of the main pillars of the New World Order that the United States has in mind is a particular kind of relationship with the Soviet Union in which the Soviet Union is conciliatory, collaborationist and subaltern – particularly when it comes to the assertion of U.S. interests in the so-called Third World. That relationship with the Soviet Union is a central aspect of the New World Order that

President Bush is trying to achieve through his military action in the Gulf. It is my contention that this central pillar of this global structure is being and will be undermined by the very actions through which the United States hopes to create that New World Order. We have seen signs of this in recent weeks in the resignation of the Foreign Minister Shervandze and in his reference in his resignation speech to the criticisms made in the Soviet Parliament of his diplomacy as concerns the Gulf crisis. The Soviet Red Army is not going to be at all happy to see the United States retaining a massive presence on USSR's Southern doorstep – astride all that oil. The Red Army is not going to take lightly the search by the United States of unilateral advantage throughout the Third World, not to mention this extra European power projection by NATO – which is what is taking place in the Gulf.

US – Soviet Relationship

This does not mean that the Soviet Union is going to react to the Gulf Crisis in the way that it did during the 1973 October War or the 1967 Mid East war or the 1956 Suez Crisis. The Soviet nuclear forces are not going to go on red alert! That is very clear. So in that sense the collaborative relationship will perhaps last the course of this conventional war. But just as the Cuban missile crisis undermined Krushchey and the victories in Vietnam, Angola, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, Nicaragua and Iran undermined U.S. – soviet detente in the Brezhnev years, U.S. imperialist aggression in the Gulf is similarly going to undermine certain aspects of Gorbachev's policies towards United States. Elements of low key contestation may surface in the coming years in the U.S. – Soviet relationship.

This itself may not be all that frightening a prospect to the United States because after all it is a Soviet Union in decline and retreat that U.S. policy makers perceive. But what kind of world will witness this deterioration of the U.S. Soviet relations? If elements of competition resurface in what kind of theatre would it be resurfacing? In what context and against what backdrop would it take place? My contention is that it will take place in a context of unprecedented instability and radicalisation.

This would impart a far greater importance to any element of friction in US - USSR relations.

Radicalism

The Gulf War, the US imperial aggression in the Gulf, may well defeat Saddam Hussein - not just his regime, but also the Iraqi state as we know it. That would be a defeat for and of a certain kind of Third World nationalism - nationalism of a radical bourgeois sort; radicalism based on state capitalism in the Third World and on despotic regimes of strongmen. But let us remember that the defeat of Nasser and of the Arab States in 1967 formed the back drop and in fact catalysed the rise of a very radical Palestinian guerrilla movement which went through a very dramatic terrorist phase. Therefore defeating the Iraqi regime and the destruction of the national bourgeois Iraqi state is only the beginning of the problem. It will lead to a tremendous degree of radicalisation in the area, radicalisation which will take many shapes and forms. Let us remember that in one of his most significant moves, Saddam Hussein ordered that the slogan 'Allahu Akbar' inscribed on the Iraqi National Flag.

The United States overthrew and defeated Mossadegh in Iran in the 1950s. This led to Ayatollah Khomeini twenty years later. The time lag will be far far less in this case and the results may be almost instantaneous. The defeat of the State capitalist Arab nationalist option represented by Saddam Hussein will result in, variously, the upsurge of Islamic revivalist/revolutionary tendencies and of secular revolutionary and national liberationist tendencies throughout the region and even further afield. I expect tremendous upsurge of Palestinian militant activities. It is very significant that Yasser Arafat, long seen as a moderate, who was in fact the most moderate element in the Palestinian Movement, took the radical stand that he did on this issue. Just as the Jordanian massacre of the Palestinians in September 1970 led to the phenomenon of Black September - a very virulent type of urban terrorism - in the next few years there will be an upsurge of Palestinian guerrilla operations throughout the world, in the occupied territories, and in the Middle East itself. Even if Saddam is defeated, it will not help the global status

quo, because the people will derive the conclusion that imperialism can be resisted not by the Saddam Hussein kind of leader, not by conventional defence, conventional armies and conventional struggles but by peoples struggles and armed guerrilla struggles.

President Bush's stated objectives to safeguard Saudi Arabia and to safeguard the American allies in the region will be drastically undermined by his action - **because Bush has succeeded in delegitimising precisely those allied regimes that he seeks to protect.** We remember the history of the IPKF stay in Sri Lanka and the tremendous erosion of legitimacy of the Jayawardena regime that resulted. That is nothing compared to the delegitimation of the Sheikdoms and the Sultanates and other state bourgeois regimes such as that of Assad and bourgeois regimes such as Mubarak that would take place in the wake of imperial aggression. Therefore Bush has undermined the two pillars of the structure of the post Cold War world that he is trying to put in place - the relationship with the Soviet Union and the base of not only the pro-Western regimes but also the economies and the state structures of the Middle East itself.

The Third World Dimension

The Arab people and Islamic people throughout the world and the thinking people of the Third World as a whole will understand very dramatically the nature of the United States, the nature of the world system and the nature of the global interstate system which the United States used so well to construct the facade it needed to launch its aggressive war. That understanding of the rules of the game, of the hypocrisy of the global interstate system, of the glaring discrepancy in its behaviour towards Israel and towards Iraq will lead to a tremendous radicalisation of consciousness. The hegemonic and imperial character of the United States has been brought home very starkly. Also the fact that imperialism means force - massive, destructive violence - and that violence is not deployed against allies like Israel, and not against monarchies or despots so long as they are allied to the United States. Therefore this war has been a crash course in imperialism for the peoples of the Third World.

Then there is the racist character of the imperial aggression. Here I want to acknowledge a debt to Mr. Izzeth Hussain who made this very clear in a recent speech at the YMMA. After all these are Americans and British who are waging a massive air war to devastate a coloured people, a people belonging to the Third World. They would never do that against the South African regime or against Israel. So all the dimensions of aggression, of massive force, of racism which characterise United States and the world system will become very clear as of today to the Arab peoples, Islamic people and the people of the Third World. There are already demonstrations in Pakistan in which Pakistan lawyers has had to be dispersed forcibly outside the U.S. Consulate by policemen. Just as the Vietnam war led to the great radicalisation of consciousness of a whole generation throughout the Third World and in the First World, the ripple effects of this war would also mean an upsurge of anti regime popular protests and even revolutionary struggles in the most unexpected parts of the world.

Contradictions

E.R. : Incidentally the Soviet Union has taken a very pro-American stand in the Gulf crisis so far. In fact I think that the Soviet State will want to act decisively to put down internal unrest and to prevent the disintegration of the Union, they would seek to gain US support or at least neutrality vis-a-vis these moves by continuing to take - very conciliatory stand on other issues - particularly regarding the Third World.

D. J. : Certainly the Soviet collaboration with the United States will last the course of the Gulf Crisis and perhaps even beyond. That is not really the point I am making. What is the United States project vis-a-vis the Soviet Union? Though the Bush administration is basically satisfied with stabilising Gorbachev, there are very powerful tendencies at work in the United States which seek a complete roll back of socialism and of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. These forces are fighting an ideological war and they now see the opportunity. They think the collapse of Communist Party regimes in Eastern Europe was a vindication of their efforts, of which Reaganism was only the

last or the latest manifestation. It goes back, on the Western side, to 1917, when Sir Winston Churchill said that the Bolshevik infant must be strangled in its cradle. The 17 interventionist armies that went into post revolutionary Soviet Union were the expression of this attempt.

This tendency on the part of the United States is manifested in the behaviour of some of its agencies, and in some of the propaganda. They will not be satisfied with anything less than the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union. They want, what they call, a multiparty democracy and a market economy. They would be very happy to see an anti communist party elected into office in the Soviet Union. Their candidate for this seems to be Boris Yeltsin. But it could be somebody even to the right of Yeltsin. They want to repeat their Eastern European victories in the Soviet Union itself. And part of that of course would be the truncation of the Soviet Union.

The United States has never accepted the incorporation of the Baltic Republics into the Soviet Union and those republics have been the theatre of the United States covert action for many decades. We must also remember that the other peripheral republics were the zones of contestation between counter revolution and revolution from 1917. Right upto the 1930s there were guerrilla bands in many of those republics. Through the '20 and right into 1930's there was a significant element of collaboration between bourgeois and petty bourgeois nationalist currents in all those republics and the imperialist forces. There was even a degree of sympathy with the invading Nazi Army which led to certain excesses on the part of Stalin in imposing collective punishment on some of those ethnic communities. But we must always remember that all of this is part of the collective memory of both the American state and the Soviet state. And here I want to underscore the distinction between regime and state, because the class character of the respective state apparatuses impose certain parametric constraints on their behaviour and also impel them into certain courses of action. This is fairly clear in the war of words that is taking place over Lithuania and this contradiction, which is now a secondary contradiction, will develop.

If co-operation, rather than contention is the primary aspect of the contradictory relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States today, I think this would not be permanent and that contention may once become the primary aspect. **Even if this is not so, even if contention remains a secondary aspect that would be a powerful source of instability in an already unstable post Gulf war world.** So what Chou En Lai once said about U.S. / European relations holds for US / Soviet relations as well. He said that the subjectively Europe and the United States will try to come together but objectively they will be driven apart. This is true of the United States and the Soviet Union. Gorbachev or whoever succeeds him may seek greater accommodation or even accept subordination to the United States but objectively the class character of the Soviet state will not permit that - given the global counter revolutionary project of the U.S. imperialist stake.

Europe and the US

Another dimension is to do with United States relationship with Europe and with Japan. One of the results of the war (perhaps not an immediate result) would be a drawing together of Europe and the Soviet Union and its assertion of an autonomous role and perspective globally. There would be increasing differentiation within the world system and among the imperialist centres. There would be increasing contradictions specially economic ones between United States, Europe and Japan.

There is also the question of popular protests in the United States and Western Europe. This is very very significant. It is, in a way, a revival of the spirit of the anti cruise missile, anti nuclear protests. In recent years popular protests were only in the Eastern bloc against the Communist Party regimes. Now, once again, you have the upsurge of popular protests in the western part of the Europe as well.

In the United States itself the war is going to bring home to the black people and the coloured people the racist character of American policy. There is an interesting trend of Islamicisation of the black people in the United States. The

more hidden consequences would be the socio-economic ones. The cost of the build up, the deployment and the war will lead to further cut backs in social welfare, eventually resulting in greater levels of poverty and greater social instability in the United States itself.

Finally I would like to refer to a point I made in an interview with your magazine in February. I was making the point that the crisis of capitalism has been temporarily obscured and over shadowed by the crisis of socialism in Eastern Europe. I made a further point that the incorporation of Eastern Europe into the capitalist world system will exacerbate that crisis because the imperialist centres would seek to export the crisis to Eastern Europe which will function as a semi periphery. On the other hand, I added that the incorporation of Eastern Europe would mean a greater load, a greater burden on world capitalist system itself. The revival of the nationalist, regional and ethnic tensions and violence in Europe might lead to a Third Worldisation or a Sri Lankianisation of parts of Europe itself.

Let's take the composite picture - a terrific degrees of instability and radicalisation of a strategically vital region of the world - the Middle East, the undermining of the collaborative relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union and the re-introduction of elements of contradictions and contestation, and the upsurge of popular protests, instability and contradictions in Eastern Europe and in Europe as a whole deriving from the economic overload on the world capitalist system. Possibly also political and social protests rocking the United States. All this add up to a very very interesting picture.

Fidel was certainly very prophetic when in 1973 at the Algiers N. A. Summit he made the point that if not for the countervailing influence of the Soviet Union the United States would have recolonised the Middle East at the time of the so called Oil Crisis. Now without that countervailing influence the United States is doing so. But for the reasons I stated earlier I don't think it would be a success. What Chou En Lai said about Indian intervention in Bangladesh may prove applicable - that the Indians have lifted a rock which will only drop on their own feet. With the

Gulf War we have entered what the old Communist International would have characterised as a period of wars and/or revolutions. My own philosophical attitude to it is the same as that of Mao in the last years of his life when he said that the global trend is one in which "countries want independence, nations want liberation, peoples want revolution. There is great disorder under heavens, the situation is excellent."

A New Synthesis

E. R. : At a seminar organized by the Worker – Peasant Institute of Kandy to commemorate the death of Dr. Newton Gunasinghe you took a completely opposite stance. In fact you stated that after the phenomenon of Polpotism a situation of "great disorder" would be "far from excellent" because it might lead to an upsurge of barbarism.

D. J. : When I said – contradicting Mao – that there is great disorder under heavens and the situation is not excellent a few months ago, I was talking in an entirely different global context. A context in which the visible collusion of the United States and the Soviet Union had unfairly, but understandably, discredited Gorbachevian New Thinking among the anti systemic movements in the Third World and was very likely to generate its antipode – not rational revolutionism but precisely the kind of irrational, atavistic revolutionism that we associate with Polpot and Khomeini. I am not saying that this situation has entirely changed. What I am saying is that in the new situation that I have described, in the scenario which I think is now unfolding, there would be two tendencies within the global anti systemic and progressive anti imperialist movements. There would be this tendency towards irrationality, fundamentalism and even barbarism. But there would be another tendency of rational socialist and democratic anti imperialism. Why do I say this? Is it just wishful thinking? Is it a pipe dream? Is it entirely Utopian? On what do I base this assertion? I say this because the global nature of the radicalisation will bring into play the peoples and the political cultures of the other parts of the world; and because this will also effect a strengthening of and a convergence with the existing healthy revolutionary forces in the world. Those are the

two factors on which I base my contention.

To concretise, the extension of instability and radicalisation to Europe will draw in the socio democratic and progressive trends in that part of the world which has very healthy ideologies and outlooks. That would be a positive influence within the global anti systemic struggle. The second factor is that there has been very very important and very deeply rooted revolutions going on and holding out in parts of the Third World. I refer to the FMLN in El Salvador, the URNG in Guatemala and the CPP – NPA in the Philippines. (In fact the NPA has said that it will attack United States bases in the Philippines in the context of Imperialist aggression in the Gulf). These revolutionary movements, have been very rational, very exemplary. In the new global upsurge that I envisage, the convergence of the rational, democratic protest movements (not a direct convergence or a simple convergence but a complex convergence), of those movements in Europe and the metropolitan centres with other exemplary revolutionary struggles in the Third World and which may also be buttressed by very important and very healthy popular struggles in South Korea instance, Brazil and the other parts of the semi peripheral world will create and open the possibility of a new synthesis.

And in this synthesis a role also will be played by a resurgent radicalism on the part of the Soviet Union. I don't think that there can be a simple reversion to Brezhnevism – God Forbid – or Stalinism. But I will not rule out a very interesting combination of new thinking with a more assertive stand (perhaps a defensive assertiveness) on the part of the Soviet State towards the imperialist project. This may take the form of a return to Gorbachev's policies of 1985-87, or of Andropovism. Of course the role of the Red Army is crucial. The Army, the KGB, the CPSU, the Russian C. P., the United Workers Front, The Soyuz Group may or may not combine. A combination of all these fractions in a single bloc would be very advantageous to the Third World. We never know how the intrinsic problems of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union will play themselves out in the new context of global instability. Given that interaction you may find the strengthen-

ing of healthy socialist tendencies in the Soviet Union and in the former Eastern Europe. That would be one of the factors that may feed into the new synthesis that I am speaking of. This is why I say that there would be two tendencies in the global anti imperialist and progressive movement. It is different from the situation that obtained several months ago. The fact that the situation has changed so drastically and so massively and in such a qualitative way, in so short a time underscores my point that we have entered a truly revolutionary period in world history. I mean revolutionary not in a simple sense but in a sense of changes of truly revolutionary import. And in this context Mao's original formulation is quite valid. Shall I say, there is great disorder under heavens and the situation may well turn out to be excellent – at least in some places!

Pessimistic Scenario

E. R. : I would like to mention a more pessimistic scenario as a counter – that the US aggression in the Gulf will lead to a polarisation not along class lines of race and religion; that this new situation will result in a strengthening of fundamentalism, backwardness and that as a result rational, social elements will be completely marginalised.

D. J. : I admit that your pessimistic scenario is a very real prospect. I would not rule it out. Still I don't think it will affect my fundamental conclusions. Let us assume the worst – that this is the beginning of a polarisation along lines of race and religion. Let us assume that it is an era of crusades and jihads. Let us assume that it divides the world into a more tightly integrated imperialist system, perhaps smaller than before, under U. S. hegemony and on the other hand an anti systemic movement that is pretty much revivalist and non rational. Still, for all, the instability that would result is the most important thing. In this unprecedented period of instability opportunities would also open up for those existing, and perhaps newly emergent, rational, revolutionary movements to make great strides because they are doing so in a situation where the imperialist metropolis is besieged by anti systemic forces – whatever their character. Never forget that it is the Islamic revolution of 1979 in Iran that

Contd. from page 17

in a way, permitted the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua also of that year!

Therefore, in this context, we will see in the Philippines, in South Korea, in Brazil and in various parts of Latin America, in South Africa, decisive advances of the revolutionary peoples movements – some of which may be even crowned with victory. Those will then have the effect of setting the example, of constituting and reinforcing the second tendency that I spoke of within the overall struggle – a rational revolutionary tendency.

We must also not forget that Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin were not unaware of this kind of possibility. Marx and Engels were not unaware of certain tendencies in the Irish Liberation struggle – for instance the Fenian terrorist bomb outrage that they condemned. But still Marx reversed its importance as that force, that lever, which could undermine British imperialism. Lenin had a similar approach to the Irish struggle in his comments on the 1916 Easter uprising and he made the point that the world revolution would not be just a simple proletarian class struggle but a whole series of revolts and rebellions which involve sometimes the most backward ideologies but which will **objectively** attack imperialism. For Stalin also this was very clear. This is why Stalin said that the Emir of Afghanistan is more progressive than the British Labour Party. I would echo this and say that this is why Saddam Hussein though, he is a despot, is objectively more progressive today than is Neil Kinnock – in the stands the two personalities have taken vis-a-vis imperialism. In Lenin's last writings he makes a point that the issue will be decided by the fact

that India, China and Persia contain the overwhelming bulk of the world's population. So – my central point stands – that these forces will resist, attack and undermine imperialism thereby weakening the system and opening the space for the advance of revolutionary socialists. The attack on imperialism in the periphery and semi-periphery may even catalyze progressive change in part of the metropolitan centers!

A Prelude

As I said I do not entirely disagree with your pessimistic scenario I would even go further than that in certain aspects. Let us assume that irrationality and barbarism become the predominant tendencies in antisystemic movements in certain countries and in certain areas of the world. This may drive the rational revolutionary elements to the margins of political existence and even to collaborative relationships with the Establishments in their own countries and internationally. I think this has been the case when both the Iranian and Iraqi Left. The Iranian Left, crushed by the Koemunist regime, sought refuge first in Baghdad and then in Paris and it was operating with Iraqi forces against the Iranian Islamic revolution. Similarly today the Iraqi Communists who were crushed by the petty bourgeois nationalist regime of Saddam Hussein, are united with other Iraqi democrats and Kurds in a Council and I am pretty sure that some of those in the Council must be waiting for the U. S. led alliance to overthrow Saddam Hussein. Now that is understandable. It is also not going to endear them to the Iraqi people but it is an impossible situation that both the Iranian and Iraqi Left find themselves

in. It is possible that this can even become a general tendency. After all let us remember our own case in Sri Lanka!

Still for all, my overall projections stands because in a situation of global instability, there will be potential, there will be opportunities for healthy revolutionary vanguards to make breakthroughs. Perhaps in some situations there will be, within the country, a contestation between these two tendencies. Let us take South Africa. If in South Africa that ANC and its Communist allies make a breakthrough it could have tremendous consequences for the whole global balance of forces. Such breakthroughs cannot be ruled out. Apart from the countries mentioned, the Law of Uneven Development can operate in such a way that ruptures in the chain of imperialism can take place in the most unexpected zones and locations. Countries that we cannot even predict may be thrown into revolutionary turmoil. Another possibility is that the anti American nationalist consciousness which will arise as a result of the Gulf War may be the prelude and the precursor of a different kind of consciousness. Let us not forget that the Chinese Revolution was after all sequential to the Chinese nationalistic youth upsurge dating from 1911. Some might even date it back to the Boxer rebellion. So in the first phase, which may be a prolonged phase, you may see non socialist forms or irrational forms of anti systemic consciousness which may be but a prelude to a second stage of the crystallisation of revolutionary consciousness. Fidel once said, 'who will make the Revolution? The people, with or without the Communist Party.' May I conclude by paraphrasing him: "Who will make the Revolution? The peoples of the Third World, with or without the Soviet Union."