



# An Absence of Debate

*Jo Vallentine looks to a new world order built on justice rather than tanks.*

**O**ne of the most ironic aspects of the Gulf War has been the way in which the industrialised nations have chosen to present the crusade against Iraq as a warning to future potential aggressors in the name of their projected New World Order.

At the same time, they have refused to acknowledge their own role in creating the problem over the last ten years, a period which saw some 30 countries sell \$46 billion worth of arms—plus technology—to the regime of Saddam Hussein, making it the world's largest importer of arms by the second half of the last decade.

According to Western intelligence officials and a variety of military experts, Saddam Hussein was able to amass the most powerful items for his arsenal by appealing to two strong emotions among his foreign suppliers: their hunger for Iraqi petro-dollars and, in the West particularly, their fear of an Iranian victory in the 1980-88 Gulf War. On top of weapons, the US approved the export to Iraq of US\$1.5 billion worth of items with dual military and civilian use, including powerful computers, precision machine tools and advanced electronics. Asked why this was possible, an anonymous intelligence official said: "Frankly, until the invasion, there was no political will to stop the Iraqis."

Michael Maloof, director of technology security operations at the Pentagon's department for trade security policy, admitted: "The reality is that our guys in the desert are now facing sophisticated American technology sold to the Iraqis over the years by the Commerce Department."

Australia did place an arms embargo on Iran and Iraq during the war but lifted it when the war ended and was on the point of concluding a deal in spare parts for Iraqi Air Force trainer aircraft worth \$850,000 when Iraq invaded Kuwait.

By February this year, Senator Robert Ray as Minister for Defence, was admitting to the National Press Club that he saw a need to control and reduce the international arms trade. However, he has yet to announce what Australia will do to stem the arms trade and so far has declined to withdraw official support from Australia's International Defence Equipment Exhibition (AIDEX 91), scheduled to

be held in Canberra this November, or to abandon the goal of doubling military exports, recommended in the 1986 Cooksey Report.

Twenty or so years from now, the Gulf War will be seen primarily as a resource war but much will depend on whether countries like the United States have learned by then to curb their appetite for cheap oil. There were efforts to improve energy efficiency and conservation after the first oil shock in 1973 but as OPEC's power declined, the world slipped back into its old ways. So far the Gulf War has not driven up oil prices but the long-term problem of oil dependency remains.

One of the more ludicrous arguments over the war concerns "linkage"—or should we acknowledge the Arab world's concern over the UN's selective indignation concerning Kuwait but not Israel's continued flouting of UN resolutions on the Occupied Territories since 1967?

There was talk of a general conference on Israel/Palestine before the Gulf War and there is talk of one after it's all over, but no connection can be acknowledged in the meantime, in case it is perceived as rewarding Saddam Hussein.

Yet the war has already strengthened the bond between the United States and Israel, and boosted Israel's attempts to isolate the PLO diplomatically. At the same time, extremist forces on both sides can only gain support whatever the outcome of the war—Israeli extremists, such as those who want to expel all Arabs from within their borders, and Moslem fundamentalist groups like Hamas (Zeal) which is already drawing support away from the PLO in places like the Gaza Strip.

In most other countries in North America and West Europe there has been a lively political debate, despite the commitment of the NATO members to the war effort. In Australia, as a result of the bipartisan foreign policy position of the ALP and the coalition, any meaningful political debate has been stifled while only 4% of federal politicians represent the 30% of Australians who are opposed to Australia's involvement in the war.

Even this does not satisfy the war party who have now turned on the ABC for giving reasonably balanced coverage of the war itself and played into the hands of

those conservative forces who were out to curb the ABC's independence even before the war began.

With the Soviet Union passively supporting the US position, the peace movement can no longer be labelled "communist". The latest abuse by supporters of the war option derives from the 1930s when charges were laid against the peace movement of wanting appeasement and "peace at any price". One letter writer to the *Launceston Examiner* (12 February) wanted to intern all critics of the war to segregate them from loyal Australians.

There is no acknowledgment of the fact that no one in the peace movement is advocating that Iraq remains in control of Kuwait. The argument is over how to get Iraq out of Kuwait—continued sanctions and negotiations or war.

Once a war is under way it is hard to stop. After the initial rallies, the peace movement will have to develop a long-term strategy, with particular focus on bridge-building and reconciliation when the war ends, just as pacifist groups did with the people of Germany and Japan after World War Two.

Clearly we need to learn more about the Middle East, the Arab World and Islam. We have to come up with creative

suggestions to give the United Nations a constructive central role in settling disputes and peacekeeping rather than acting as a rubber stamp for US military power.

There also needs to be an awareness of how the war has allowed the rehabilitation of unpleasant repressive regimes like China, Syria and Turkey, as well as letting the forces of reaction gain the upper hand in the Soviet Union. Once more the Baltic States may be the victims of world indifference while the UN wages its Holy war in the Gulf in an eerie parallel with the events of 1956.

As for the New World Order, there is nothing new about using military force to get what you want and we have yet to hear any details of what else it involves. A real New World Order would be based on non-military solutions to conflict, an end to the global arms trade, the equitable distribution of resources, a just price for commodities and the establishment of international forums to resolve global problems like the Greenhouse effect and other problems that transcend national boundaries.

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# An Orrery of Errors

*John Langmore argues that, although there were numerous opportunities to stop short of war, the war itself is not unjust.*

**T**here is no doubt that Iraq had no justification for invading Kuwait, which was an independent country with internationally recognised and accepted borders. Saddam Hussein is a megalomaniac and a ruthless dictator and nothing in his behaviour or policies has suggested that he has any willingness to act reasonably in accordance with international norms.

Nevertheless, throughout the Gulf crisis US actions have been presented to us as inevitable. Yet at every point alternatives were possible, and commonly preferable. Following the UN Security Council's imposition of the trade embargo in mid-August, the US quickly began a massive

military build-up in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf waters, describing such action as necessary to defend Saudi Arabia. But deployment occurred under US, rather than UN, control. The US should have adopted the proper procedure under the UN Charter and secured a resolution under Article 43 to create a United Nations force under the United Nations Military Staff Committee. That would have provided a more effective command structure, but would not have prevented the US from providing the general-in-command of overall operations in which the US has been by far the largest contributor.

Australia's involvement should certainly have been more carefully considered and conditional on deployment under a UN Military Staff Committee. In that way, procedures for dealing with reasonable conflict in a post-Cold War world could have been established which would have