Palestine, the Jewish state of Israel and the Arab state of Jordan. The sooner those two states engage in direct negotiations to resolve the border between them and to mutually recognise each other's existence the sooner peace is likely to come to the Middle East.

David Singer,
Convenor,
Jordan is Palestine Committee.

The New Hitler?

The exchange between Fred Halliday and Joe Stork on the Gulf crisis in ALR (November 1990) certainly raised important aspects of the crisis which are too often ignored by those on the Left here.

But Halliday's conclusion that he would support the West using military force to defeat Saddam Hussein if other political and peaceful options failed is impossible to accept, not simply because of a "general hostility to war" but because this particular war would be such a disastrous one for all involved.

Halliday characterises the Iraqi regime as "fascist". Certainly the condemnation he makes of it is accurate, and the regime's crimes should never be forgotten. But 'fascist' is too easy a term. For Halliday, Ba'athism is reduced to something "racist" with an ideology that is a "mythical, mystical and bombastic evocation of the greatness of the Arabs".

But Ba'athism is also a secular nationalism, anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist, at least in its origin, with an "evocation" of socialism and social justice. The bloody repression so ruthlessly carried out by Saddam Hussein is only quantitatively - not qualitatively - different from that of the Syrian Ba'athist regime of Assad.

Halliday stretches his argument beyond credibility by claiming that because Iraq is a "fascist state", then any US-led Western invasion of that country could be compared to the action of the Allies in World War II. But if Hussein is the 'new Hitler', as Halliday apparently agrees with Bush that he is, then what of the new Mussolinis (Syria's Assad?), the Francos (the Turkish regime?) or the Tojos (the Saudi emirs?) who on this occasion are lined up with the 'democratic' West?

As deplorable as the invasion of Kuwait was, any full scale war would result in casualties many hundreds times greater. Halliday dismisses the reaction as "a general hostility to war". Unless you adopt a "thorough-going pacifist position", the "normal" response is to justify a "military response," he says.

But what if even the harshest economic blockade fails to force Saddam Hussein to withdraw from Kuwait, Halliday asks? Do you let him keep his ill-gotten gains? It's a fair question. But it remains a question of time. Sanctions are already biting in Iraq, particularly in industry. At a certain point that will bring the country to a halt. It could take another year or more. But isn't it best to allow time for them to bite than to sacrifice some many lives?

Joe Stork is right when he says "whatever happens, I think it is vital to avoid a shooting war", even though he ends up half agreeing with Halliday at the end. It really is time to give peace (and sanctions) a chance.

Denis Freney
Sydney, NSW.

LETTERS

Two States

In the article "Oil Spills" (ALR, September 1990) Michael Humphrey writes: "Another Arab-Israeli War and Arab defeat would deepen the conflict in the Arab world and in the worst scenario see the 'Jordan is Palestine' doctrine imposed through the annexation of the occupied territories by Israel."

The Jordan is Palestine doctrine as expounded by this organisation for the past ten years has been designed to point out that Jordan occupies almost 80% of the territory once called Palestine and to that extent that the Arab residents of the territory once called Palestine already have their own sovereign state.

No clearer exposition of these facts could be found than in the statement of Abu Iyad, the PLO Number Two man after Arafat who was reported in Kuna, 15 December 1989 as saying:

You cannot make distinctions between a Jordanian and a Palestinian...all those who tried in the past and are still trying to create divisions between the Jordanian and Palestinian people have failed. We indeed constitute one people.

There are already two successor states in the former territory of Palestine, the Jewish state of Israel and the Arab state of Jordan. The sooner those two states engage in direct negotiations to resolve the border between them and to mutually recognise each other's existence the sooner peace is likely to come to the Middle East.

David Singer,
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Jordan is Palestine Committee.

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Arguing by such anti-historical comparisons gets us nowhere. The situation is very concrete and the desirable outcome clear: the Iraqis must withdraw from Kuwait and the US and its allies get out of Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the region. The criminal Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza must then be ended.

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