

Gulf War Pullout

Noam Chomsky

February 1991

Contents

The “Logic” of War	3
Questions and Answers	4

The “Logic” of War

To effectively combat war in the Gulf we have to understand its motives. Bush is seeking to get Iraq out of Kuwait. Possibly he is seeking to reduce Iraq to rubble. But that is not the whole story.

Hundreds of U.S. bombers are not “storming” Iraq to maintain cheap oil. (1) The cost of more expensive oil would be much less than the cost of the military operation. (2) Oil prices have a marked-regulated cap anyhow. If oil producers raise prices too high for too long, users drift away which is self-defeating for oil rich countries. (3) Insofar as high oil prices cause problems to industrialized economies, Europe and Japan are more vulnerable than the U.S., so relative to these countries higher oil prices often *help* our economy at a time of its threatened dissolution.

Fleets of U.S. helicopters are not “storming” Iraq to honor Kuwait’s national sovereignty. U.S. history is a near continuous chronicle of violating other countries’ national sovereignty for even less compelling reasons than those Saddam Hussein offers to rationalize his militarism. For example, Kuwait’s oil policies were certainly more damaging to Iraq’s economy than Panama’s policies were to the U.S. economy. No U.S. elected official or mainstream media commentator has even hinted that our invasion of Panama was just as much a violation of national sovereignty as Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait. Respect for national sovereignty is an after-the-fact rationalization of Desert Storm, not a motive.

U.S. troops are not “storming” Iraq because we fear Hitlerite expansionism. Iraq is only a local power, not pre-World War II Germany. Iraq just spent the 1980s *failing* to conquer Iran despite U.S. support.

The real reason for U.S. opposition to Iraqi occupation of Kuwait is not to keep oil prices low, but to keep Washington, Wall Street, and their allies in charge of setting oil prices. We are fighting to maintain and even enlarge one of our few continuing claims to international economic clout: control of oil prices. The Bush administration and the New York Times alike view the Mideast as an extension of Texas. It is “our oil,” not theirs. The U.S. oil posture is not a sober defense of countries dependent on oil. It is a greedy offensive that pursues U.S. oil advantage. Most countries, particularly Third World countries, suffer horribly for these policies.

But fulfilling our imperial need to control the “oil card” requires only that Hussein be pushed out of Kuwait. A second question therefore arises. Why not let diplomacy and sanctions push Hussein out? Why escalate the war?

The answer is at the heart of understanding the U.S. role in the so-called “new world order.” George Bush wants Hussein out of Kuwait, yes. But he does not want UN activism, international sanctions, and multilateral diplomacy credited with causing withdrawal. From Bush’s perspective a diplomatic solution would be as bad as Hussein’s interference in the first place. Diplomatic success would undercut the efficacy of U.S. military interventionism, now, and well into the future. And it would add powerful fuel to calls for a “peace dividend” and conversion here in the U.S.

On the other hand, the early dispatch of hundreds of thousands of U.S. troops and immense firepower allowed Bush to enter what he undoubtedly saw as a “win/win” game. If Hussein had withdrawn Bush would have claimed he did so due to our military threat, thus establishing the logic of continued military spending to maintain peace. Now, the U.S. will forcibly annihilate Hussein, again evidencing the necessity for military might. The goal of our drive to war is to maintain the region’s effective colonization *while re-legitimizing militarism*. Now Secretary of

Defense Cheney will argue not only for increased conventional military expenditures, but also for nuclear and star wars expenditures to forestall future Third World conflicts and/or smash future dictators who stray from doing our bidding. Desert Storm is, therefore, also a war against the redistribution of domestic wealth and power than conversion away from militarism implies. It is a war against Iraq, but also a war against the poor in our own country.

For years the U.S. has been the biggest economic power and has shared contested military dominance with the Soviet Union. Now we are alone at the top of the military heap with the biggest, best, and most numerous weapons of every conceivable type. Moreover, our economy is losing its ability to coerce international obedience. The U.S. is climbing down the ladder of economic influence as U.S. military stature rises without limit. Big guns and fewer dollars suggest a warfare state hiring out as the world's enforcer. Now we fight Exxon's wars *and* anyone else's, as long as they pay the proper fees, either because they want to or, if necessary, because we force them to. Have gun will travel. Destination: a warrior state domestically and internationally.

The first battle over this scenario is unfolding now in the Mideast, as well as here at home. Will militarism be re-legitimated or will conversion gain momentum as a policy alternative? To reverse Bush's war scenario social movements must explain the underlying forces compelling Bush's violence and galvanize the deep-rooted and sustained opposition needed to stop it.

Questions and Answers

1. Does the U.S. oppose aggression? No.

- Aggression is fine if it's in U.S. interests. It's bad only if it's opposed to U.S. interests. The U.S. invaded Panama and imposed a puppet regime still under U.S. control. The world objected so we vetoed two UN Security Council resolutions.
- Turkey invaded northern Cyprus, broke it up, killed two thousand people, tried to destroy relics of Greek civilization, drove out 200,000 people. That was fine. Turkey is our ally.
- Israel attacked Lebanon, killed about 20,000 people, bombarded the capital, and still occupies southern Lebanon. The U.S. vetoed a series of UN Security Council resolutions to terminate that aggression. Israel holds on to the occupied territories. It has annexed some of them. Fine. The U.S. supports Israel.
- Morocco invaded the Western Sahara, annexed it. The U.S. thinks that's fine.
- Indonesia invaded East Timor. Two hundred thousand killed. The worst slaughter relative to the population since the Holocaust. The U.S. gives them aid.
- Iraq attacked Iran. The U.S. assisted them. Iraq gassed the Kurds in the north of Iraq. Fine. After all, the Turks are having problems with the Kurds too and the Turks are our ally.
- Iraq invades Kuwait. Outrage. Cries of Hitler reborn. Send 400,000 troops. Bomb Baghdad.
- The United States can claim it's opposed to aggression on ABC News without ridicule because we have a disciplined intellectual class who look the other way and/or lie as a matter of course. In the Third World, however, the claim is seen as ludicrous. People there consider the U.S. the major violator of the principle that aggression is wrong.

2. Does the U.S. oppose proliferation of super-weapons? No.

- In April 1990, Saddam Hussein, then still the U.S.'s friend and ally, offered to destroy his chemical and biological weapons if Israel agreed to destroy its non-conventional weapons—including its nuclear weapons. The State Department welcomed Hussein's offer to destroy his own arsenal, but rejected the link "to other issues or weapons systems."
- Acknowledgment of the existence of Israeli nuclear weapons would raise the question why all U.S. aid to Israel is not illegal under 1970s congressional legislation that bars aid to any country engaged in clandestine nuclear weapons development.
- In December 1990, speaking at a joint press conference with Secretary of State Baker, then Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze proposed a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East if Iraq withdraws from Kuwait. Baker gave "qualified support," the press observed, but "carefully avoided using the words nuclear-free zone" — for the reason just noted.
- A week later, Iraq offered to "scrap chemical and mass destruction weapons if Israel was also prepared to do so," Reuters reported. The offer seems to have passed in silence here. Weapons proliferation for our allies — including Iraq before August 2 — is fine.
- Iraq's more recent call for "the banning of all weapons of mass destruction in the region" as part of a negotiated settlement of its withdrawal from Kuwait evoked no Western support.

3. So what *is* Bush concerned about? Domination.

- Iraq violated a fundamental principle of world affairs — that the energy reserves of the Middle East have to be firmly in the hands of U.S. energy corporations and trusted U.S. clients like Saudi Arabia's elites.
- This means Mideast populations do not really benefit from their own resource, but "so what," says Bush. The West benefits because Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, and Qatar are basically sectors of London and New York. The U.S. government doesn't care if the Saudi elite administers oil prices because that's like having it done on Wall Street.
- The U.S. does care if an independent Arab nationalist threatens to use the resources for domestic purposes. The U.S. opposes that kind of behavior anywhere in the world. That is why we "destroy cities to save them."
- The State Department says Mideast oil is a "stupendous source of strategic power" and "one of the greatest prizes in world history." So what if it's in the Mideast?
- In Iran in 1953 we overthrew a nationalist parliamentary regime. Now we threaten a murderous tyrant's regime, although Hussein was just as much a murderous tyrant before August 2, when we supported him because doing so furthered U.S. interests.

4. Why does Bush oppose negotiations? They might work.

- The U.S. is *usually* against diplomacy. If the U.S. can establish force as the way to rule the world, the U.S. wins because it's way ahead in force. If diplomacy succeeds, it delegitimizes militarism, reduces the relevance of military might and increases the relevance of diplomacy.
 - This is also why the U.S. adamantly opposes linkage between Kuwait and the West Bank. The U.S. supports linkage when it benefits us. But in this case we're against linkage, and the reason is not just because Israel is our ally, but because linkage is a step toward diplomatically resolving the Gulf *and* Arab-Israeli crises. The U.S. opposes a *diplomatic* settlement of either crisis and therefore certainly opposes a joint diplomatic settlement of both of them.
 - When Bush sent 400,000 troops instead of 15,000, which could have been just as effective in preventing further Iraqi aggression, he did it to scuttle negotiations and leave only military might as the arbiter. His worst nightmare is a negotiated solution that would legitimate the rule of international law rather than U.S. power.
5. What is the New World Order all about? Same as the old, with an ominous new wrinkle.
- In the London Financial Times of November 21, 1990, a respected commentator describes the Gulf crisis as a “watershed event in U.S. international relations,” which will be seen in history as having “turned the U.S. military into an internationally financed public good.” In the 1990s, he continues, “there is no realistic alternative [to] the U.S. military assuming a more explicitly mercenary role than it has played in the past.”
 - The financial editor of the Chicago Tribune recently put the point less delicately: we must exploit our “virtual monopoly in the security market...as a lever to gain funds and economic concessions” from Germany and Japan. The U.S. has “cornered the West’s security market” and will therefore be “the world’s rent-a-cops.”
 - Some will call us “Hessians,” he continues, but “that’s a terribly demeaning phrase for a proud, well-trained, well-financed and well-respected military” and whatever anyone may say, “we should be able to pound our fists on a few desks” in Japan and Europe, and “extract a fair price for our considerable services,” demanding that our rivals “buy our bonds at cheap rates, or keep the dollar propped up, or better yet, pay cash directly into our Treasury.” “We could change this role” of enforcer, he concludes, “but with it would go much of our control over the world economic system.”
6. Why is Bush so eager to wage war? Momentum and preference!
- Having sent a gigantic military force to ensure that any Gulf resolution would be military, Bush left himself few options. Either Hussein would withdraw, with or without concessions, or we would bomb him out. Bush could not maintain so high a level of force indefinitely nor withdraw without a resolution of the crisis.
 - But Bush has shown that he actually favored war. Why was he so eager to start a conflagration that could endanger oil supplies, our place in the Mideast, and international alliances — all things he certainly holds dear?

- The answer has to be that there is something about the effects of war that Bush finds desirable. In the “rubble” he wants to “bounce” in Baghdad, Bush sees a prize worth struggling for.
- What could it be? Peace? No. Justice? No. Stability? No. So what?
- Bush is seeking the legitimization of war, the end of the “peace dividend,” and the elevation of the U.S. to the status of World Mercenary Police, thus ensuring years more of U.S. international domination even as our economy flounders. *That’s his preferred scenario.*
- Additionally, many CEOs and other influential economic and political figures fear a serious collapse of the U.S. economy. To push up the price of oil dramatically and ensure that the super revenues are then invested in U.S. banks is, they think, one way to avert this collapse. They do not care if this approach will also mean blood, gore, pain, retribution, and hate for years to come.

7. What will be the results of war? Rivers of blood.

- If the U.S. military is not curtailed, tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands or even a million Arab lives will be lost.
- Thousands and perhaps tens of thousands of U.S. lives will be lost.
- Countless Third World lives will be lost via inflated oil prices and international economic turmoil.
- There will be world wide economic recession. Mideast destabilization with unknown repercussions. Increased nightmares for Palestinians. Possible disaster for Israel. Possible ecological devastation.
- The peace dividend will be reduced or lost. Military expenditures will be reenlarged.
- The Hessianization of the U.S. and subordination of international affairs to U.S. mercenary might will proceed.
- A new “enemy,” the Moslem world, will help scare the U.S. public into tolerating outrageous defense appropriations.
- And, if all goes as planned, U.S. corporate officials and state policy-makers will continue to oversee vast wealth and unfettered power — the real motive for U.S. intervention in the first place.

8. Why does the U.S. oppose linkage? Fear of isolation.

- There has long been a broad international consensus on a political settlement of this conflict. The U.S. and Israel have opposed it and have been isolated in this rejectionism, as numerous lopsided General Assembly votes (most recently 151–3) indicate.

- President Bush likes to tell us how James Baker has labored for peace, but remains silent about the terms of the famed Baker plan, whose basic principles ban an “additional Palestinian state”; bar any “change in the status of Judea, Samaria, and Gaza other than in accordance with the basic guidelines of the [Israeli] Government,” preclude any meaningful Palestinian self-determination; reject negotiations with the PLO, thus denying Palestinians the right to choose their own political representation; and call for “free elections” under Israeli military rule.
- Regarding the Palestinian question, it is therefore the world against George Bush and his predecessors. For this reason, since long before Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait the U.S. has consistently opposed an international conference on the Middle East.
- Such a conference would lead to pressures for a just political settlement that the U.S. rejects, since by force they can maintain an unjust situation. For the same reasons the U.S. has vetoed Security Council resolutions calling for a political settlement and blocked other diplomatic initiatives for the past 20 years.

9. Why oppose war in the Gulf? It’s wrong.

- Some liberals oppose a Gulf war on the grounds it will be too expensive. Usually they mean lost stability, lost resources, or heightened recession. Sometimes they mean lost U.S. lives. Rarely do they mean lost Arab lives. While these costs are real, the best grounds on which to oppose the Gulf War is that it is not just.
- It is not anti-interventionist. It is not pro-national sovereignty. It is not pro-international legality. It is not pro-“a new and more peaceful world order.”
- This war is to reinforce U.S. control of Arab oil. It is to crush Arab nationalism.
- It is to establish the U.S. as the world’s policeman with the bills paid, whether they like it or not, by whoever we pass them on to.
- This war should be opposed because it is wrong. We have no right controlling oil prices. No right administering the future of the Middle East. And no right becoming the world’s Hessian state, sacrificing much of the U.S. population to a Third World existence in the process.
- We should oppose this war because we oppose militarism as a solution to international conflict.

10. What is the logic of our antiwar activism? Raise the social cost.

- Arguments that war is immoral will not deter Bush. Arguments that he isn’t seeing the costs will not change his mind.
- Pursuers of war, including Bush, don’t care about Iraqi lives, American lives, or anyone’s lives. The same holds, by and large, for U.S. media which has yet to discuss the potential loss of Arab lives as a central cost of war.

- Nor do U.S. warmakers care about subtle concerns of culture or history. They care about advancing the geopolitical interests of the U.S. as they are understood by the White House and Wall Street. That's all.
- To get Bush to reverse his war policies requires that the public raise costs that warmakers don't want to pay.
- Warmakers do not want to endure an end to business as usual. They do not want war to cause a new generation to turn to activism. They dread the escalation of dissent from events that oppose war, to actions that oppose militarism, to projects that oppose capitalism.
- These costs curtailed U.S. militarism in Indochina. They can do the same, and more, in the Gulf.
- Raise the social cost.

11. What should be the focus of our activism? Peace and justice.

- Antiwar activity needs to develop lasting consciousness of the causes and purposes of U.S. war policies including understanding underlying institutions. And it also needs to send a powerful message of dissent.
- Events that focus on ROTC, on campus military centers, such as military bases or the Pentagon, and that demand an end to war are excellent.
- Events that focus on centers of domestic suffering that demand an end to war *and* end to militarism *and* a reallocation of military resources to social ends, are still more powerful.
- Multi-focused events will reveal and enlarge not only antiwar militance, but militance extending to gender, race, and class policies and institutions that war-makers hold even more dear. Multi-issue events send an even more powerful and threatening message than single issue efforts, and can have that much more impact.
- They also have the capacity to build a movement that can last beyond the Gulf crisis to attack the causes as well as the symptoms of oppressive institutions. Build a movement not just for peace, but for peace and justice too.
- Create a multi-issue focus.

12. What tactics should we use? Demonstrate, demand, disobey.

- A gathering of people at a teach-in to learn about U.S. policies threatens leaders of a country who want people as ignorant as possible. A march with many constituencies threatens the leadership of a country who want people as passive and divided as possible. A march that include civil disobedience and says that some people are willing to break laws and, moreover, next time many more will do so, is still more powerful.
- Create a multi-tactic movement.

- But lasting movements also have to develop a positive component that can become a center of organizing energy and a place for learning and support.
- In addition to teach-ins, marches, rallies, and civil disobedience, we need to create lasting coalitions and institutional centers of Peace and Justice in occupied buildings on campuses or in community centers, and/or churches.
- Such student and community centers could be places for people to do peace work: creating leaflets and banners and writing letters to GIs. They could be places from which people could do systematic coordinated canvassing and provide each other with support and help.
- Further, these campus and community centers could be places where people consider how their universities or communities might become centers of peace and conversion rather than militarism. Create a long-term movement.

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)
Anti-Copyright



Noam Chomsky
Gulf War Pullout
February 1991

Retrieved on 8th June 2021 from chomsky.info
From *Z Magazine*, February, 1991

usa.anarchistlibraries.net