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“What We Say Goes”

The Middle East in the New World Order

Noam Chomsky

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

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in February 1989 by Yitzhak Rabin of the Labor Party, then Defense Secretary, when he informed Peace Now leaders of his satisfaction with the US-PLO dialogue, meaningless discussions to divert attention while Israel suppresses the Intifada by force. The Palestinians “will be broken,” Rabin promised, reiterating the prediction of Israeli Arabists 40 years earlier: the Palestinians will “be crushed,” will die or “turn into human dust and the waste of society, and join the most impoverished classes in the Arab countries.” Or they will leave, while Russian Jews, now barred from the US by policies designed to deny them a free choice, flock to an expanded Israel, leaving the diplomatic issues moot, as the Baker-Shamir-Peres plan envisaged.⁵⁰

These are some of the contours of the planned New World Order that come into view as the beguiling rhetoric is lifted away.

⁵⁰ For references, see my article in Z magazine, Jan. 1990, and Deterring Democracy.

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call if needed, and can now be freely deployed, with the Soviet deterrent gone. The US will seek some agreement among its clients, and might even consider an international conference, if it can be properly managed. As Henry Kissinger insisted, Europe and Japan must be kept out of the diplomacy, but the USSR might be tolerated on the assumption that it will be obedient in its current straits.

As for the Palestinians, the US can now move towards the solution outlined by James Baker well before the Gulf crisis: Jordan is the Palestinian state; the occupied territories are to be ruled in accord with the basic guidelines of the Israeli government, with Palestinians permitted to collect local taxes in Nablus; their political representatives will be chosen for them, with the PLO excluded; and “free elections” will be held under Israeli military control with the Palestinian leadership in prison camps. The reality will be masked behind such slogans as “territorial compromise” and “land for peace,” interpreted in accord with traditional Labor Party rejectionism, always favored by the US over the Likud variant: Israel will take what it wants in the territories, leaving the surplus population stateless or under Jordanian administration. New excuses will be devised for old policies, which will be hailed as generous and forthcoming.

Economic development for the Palestinians had always been barred, while their land and water were taken. The Labor Party leadership advised that the Palestinians should be given the message: “You shall continue to live like dogs, and whoever wishes, may leave” (Moshe Dayan, more pro-Palestinian than most).⁴⁹ The advice was followed, though the grim story was largely suppressed here. Palestinians had been permitted to serve the Israeli economy as virtual slave labor, but this interlude is passing. The recent curfew administered a further blow to the Palestinian economy. The victors can now proceed with the policy articulated

⁴⁹ Yossi Beilin, *Mehiro shel Ihud* (Revivim, 1985), reviewing internal cabinet records.

dence decline. The press failed to give Bush sufficient credit for his achievements in his Fall 1990 tour of Latin America. Mexico was induced to allow US oil companies new access to its resources, a long-sought policy goal. US companies will now be able “to help Mexico’s nationalized oil company,” as the Wall Street Journal prefers to construe the matter. Our fondest wish for many years has been to help our little brown brothers, and at last the ignorant peons will allow us to cater to their needs.⁴⁷

The population at home must also be controlled, and diverted from the growing domestic crises. The basic means have already been described, including periodic campaigns against “much weaker enemies”: Cuba is a likely next target, perhaps in time for the next election, if illegal economic warfare, terrorism, intimidation of others to bar normal relations, and other devices can set the stage.

In the Middle East, the US is now well placed to impose its will. The traditional strategic conception has been that the US and its British lieutenant should maintain effective power but indirect control along lines explained by Lord Curzon in the days of British dominance: it is preferable to rule behind an “Arab facade,” with “absorption” of the quasi-colony “veiled by constitutional fictions as a protectorate, a sphere of influence, a buffer State, and so on.” But we must never run the risk of “losing control,” as John Foster Dulles and many others warned.⁴⁸ The local managers of Gulf oil riches are to be protected by regional enforcers, preferably non-Arab: Turkey, Israel, Pakistan and Iran, which perhaps can be restored to the fold. Bloody tyrants of the Hafez el-Assad variety, with his minority-based dictatorship, may be allowed to take part, possibly even Egypt if it can be purchased, though the regime is not brutal enough to be reliable. US and British force remain on

⁴⁷ WSJ, Nov. 28, 1990.

⁴⁸ William Stivers, *Supremacy and Oil* (Cornell, 1982), 28, 34; *America’s Confrontation with Revolutionary Change in the Middle East* (St. Martin’s, 1986), 20f.

With the Gulf war officially over, broader questions come to the fore: What are the likely contours of the New World Order, specifically, for the Middle East? What do we learn about the victors, whose power is at least temporarily enhanced?

A standard response is that we live in “an era full of promise,” “one of those rare transforming moments in history” (James Baker). The United States “has a new credibility,” the President announced, and dictators and tyrants everywhere know “that what we say goes.” George Bush is “at the height of his powers” and “has made very clear that he wants to breathe light into that hypothetical creature, the Middle East peace process” (Anthony Lewis). So things are looking up.¹

Others see a different picture. A Catholic weekly in Rome, close to the Vatican, writes that Bush is the “surly master of the world,” who deserves “the Nobel War Prize” for ignoring opportunities for peace in the Gulf. Bush “had the very concrete possibility of a just peace and he chose war.” He “didn’t give a damn” about the many peace appeals of Pope John Paul II and proposals of others, never veering from his objective of a murderous war (Il Sabato).

The Times of India described Bush’s curt dismissal of Iraq’s February 15 offer to withdraw from Kuwait as a “horrible mistake,” which showed that the West sought a “regional Yalta where the powerful nations agree among themselves to a share of Arab spoils.... [The West’s] conduct throughout this one month has revealed the seamiest sides of Western civilisation: its unrestricted appetite for dominance, its morbid fascination for hi-tech military might, its insensitivity to ‘alien’ cultures, its appalling jingoism....” A leading Third World monthly condemned “The most cowardly war ever fought on this planet.” The foreign editor of Brazil’s major daily wrote that “What is being practiced in the Gulf is pure

¹ Baker, Address to the Los Angeles World Affairs Council, Oct. 29, 1990. Bush, Feb. 1; cited by Robert Parry, *Nation*, April 15, 1991. Lewis, *NYT*, March 15, 1991.

barbarism — ironically, committed in the name of civilization. Bush is as responsible as Saddam.... Both, with their inflexibility, consider only the cold logic of geopolitical interests [and] show an absolute scorn for human life.” The “Business Magazine of the Developing World” predicts that the Arab states will “in effect...become *vassal states*,” losing such control as they once had over their resources (South, London).²

All of this was before the glorious “turkey shoot” in the desert and the “euphoria” and unconcealed bloodlust it evoked until the news managers thought better of the project and suddenly called it off.

Outside the West, such perceptions are common. One experienced British journalist observes that “Despite the claims by President Bush that Desert Storm is supported by ‘the whole world’, there can be little doubt about which side has won the contest for the hearts and minds of the masses of the Third World; it is not the US” (Geoffrey Jansen). Commenting on the world’s “moral unease” as the air war began, John Lloyd noted in the London Financial Times that the US and Britain are a “tiny minority in the world” in their war policy. South concludes that the French, Italians and Turks joined the US-British war only “to secure a slice of the pie in the form of lucrative reconstruction and defence contracts in a post-war Gulf or in the form of aid and credits or both.” Reports from the Third World, including most of the neighboring countries, indicated substantial, often overwhelming, popular opposition to the US-UK war, barely controlled by the US-backed tyrannies. The Iraqi democratic opposition publicly opposed the war, and even the most pro-American Iraqi exiles condemned the “wanton quality

² Il Sabato, March 2 (AP, Feb. 26); Times of India, cited by William Dalrymple (writing “on why the Iraqi dictator is the most popular pin-up in India”), London Spectator, Feb. 23; Third World Resurgence (Malaysia), No. 6, Feb.; cover, No. 7, March 1991; Folha de Sao Paulo, Ken Silverstein, p.c.; South, Feb. 1991.

on the mafia to break their bones. And if you fall behind in your premium, your health may suffer too.⁴⁵

The use of force to control the Third World is only a last resort. Economic weapons remain a more efficient instrument. Some of the newer mechanisms can be seen in the Uruguay Round negotiations, now in disarray because of conflicts among the rich, but sure to be revived in one or another form. Western powers call for liberalization when that is in their interest; and for enhanced protection of domestic economic actors, when *that* is in their interest. The major concern of the US in the GATT negotiations was not agricultural policy, as much of the coverage suggested, but rather the “new themes,” as they are called: guarantees for “intellectual property rights” (ranging from pop culture to software and patents), removal of constraints on services and investment, and so on; a mixture of liberalization and protectionism, determined by the interests of the powerful. The effect of these measures would be to restrict Third World governments to a police function to control their working classes and superfluous population, while transnational corporations gain free access to their resources and monopolize new technology and global investment and production — and of course are granted the central planning, allocation, production and distribution functions denied to governments, which suffer from the defect that they might fall under the baleful influence of the rabble. These facts have not been lost on Third World commentators, who have been protesting eloquently and mightily. But their voices are as welcome here as those of Iraqi democrats.⁴⁶

The US will try to establish more firmly its own regional dominance, exploiting “free trade” to secure super-cheap labor in Mexico, the Caribbean, and other dependencies, while Canadian resources are taken over and its industry and cultural indepen-

⁴⁵ William Neikirk, Chicago Tribune, Sept. 9, 1990; Jan. 27, 1991.

⁴⁶ See particularly Chakravathi Raghavan, Recolonization; Martin Khor Kok Peng, The Uruguay Round and Third World Sovereignty (Third World Network, Malaysia, 1990).

The Contours of the New World Order

Despite basic continuities, there have been changes in the international system. It is by now a truism that the world is economically “tripolar.” The collapse of Soviet tyranny adds new dimensions: much of Eastern Europe can be restored to its former status as a quasi-colonial dependency of the West; new pretexts are needed for intervention; there is no longer any deterrent to the use of military force by the United States. But though it has a virtual monopoly of military force, the US no longer has the economic base to impose “order and stability” (meaning, a proper respect for the masters) in the Third World. Therefore, as the business press has been advising, the US must become a “mercenary state,” paid for its services by German-led continental Europe and Japan, and relying on the flow of capital from Gulf oil production, which it will dominate. The same is true of its British lieutenant, also facing serious domestic problems, but with a “sturdy national character” and proper tradition. John Keegan, a prominent British military historian and defense commentator for the right-wing Daily Telegraph, outlines the common view succinctly: “The British are used to over 200 years of expeditionary forces going overseas, fighting the Africans, the Chinese, the Indians, the Arabs. It’s just something the British take for granted,” and the war in the Gulf “rings very, very familiar imperial bells with the British.”⁴⁴

The financial editor of the conservative Chicago Tribune has been stressing these themes with particular clarity. We must be “willing mercenaries,” paid for our ample services by our rivals, using our “monopoly power” in the “security market” to maintain “our control over the world economic system.” We should run a global protection racket, he advises, selling “protection” to other wealthy powers who will pay us a “war premium.” This is Chicago, where the words are understood: if someone bothers you, you call

⁴⁴ Richard Hudson, WSJ, Feb. 5, 1991.

of the violence” in Bush’s “dirty and excessively destructive war” (Samir al-Khalil).³

Before evaluating such conflicting perceptions, we have to settle a methodological question. There are two ways to proceed. One is to rely on the rhetoric of power: George Bush has “made it clear” that he is going to “breathe light” into the problems of suffering humanity; that settles the matter. Perhaps there are some blemishes on our record, but we have undergone another of those miraculous changes of course that occur at convenient moments, so we need not trouble ourselves with the documentary record, the events of past and present history, and their institutional roots. That is the easy way, and the path to respectability and privilege. Another approach, lacking these advantages, is to consider the facts. Not surprisingly, these approaches commonly yield quite different conclusions.

“The Surly Master of the World”

Adopting the second approach, we face some obvious questions. Consider the President’s proud boast that *dictators and tyrants* know “that what we say goes.” It is beyond dispute that the US has no problem with dictators and tyrants if they serve US interests, and will attack and destroy committed democrats if they depart from their service function. The correct reading of Bush’s words, then, is: “What we say goes,” whoever you may be.

Continuing on this course, we find no grounds to expect George Bush to “breathe light” into the Middle East peace process, or any other problem. In fact, why is the peace process a “hypothetical creature”? Though inexpressible in polite company, the answer is

³ Jansen, Middle East International, Feb. 22; Lloyd, FT, Jan. 19–20; Iraqi democrats, see below; al-Khalil, New York Review, March 18, 1991; South, Feb. 1991. Sources in Syria estimated that 80–90% of the population opposed its participation in the war (Sarah Gauch, Christian Science Monitor, March 28, 1991). Much the same was reported elsewhere.

not obscure: the US has kept it that way. Washington has barred the way to a diplomatic settlement of the Arab-Israel conflict since February 1971 (coincidentally, just as George Bush appeared on the national scene as UN Ambassador), when Kissinger backed Israel's rejection of Egyptian President Sadat's proposal for a peace settlement in terms virtually identical to official US policy, without even a gesture towards the Palestinians. The US has regularly rejected other peace proposals, vetoed Security Council resolutions, and voted against General Assembly resolutions calling for a political settlement. In December 1990, the General Assembly voted 144-2 (US and Israel) to call an international conference. A year before, the Assembly voted 151-3 (US, Israel, Dominica) for a settlement incorporating the wording of UN Resolution 242, along with "the right to self-determination" for the Palestinians.⁴ The NATO allies, the USSR, the Arab states, and the nonaligned countries have been united for years in seeking a political settlement along these lines, but the US will not permit it, so the peace process remains "hypothetical."

In part for similar reasons, reduction of armaments has been a "hypothetical creature." In April 1990, Bush flatly rejected a proposal from his friend Saddam Hussein to eliminate weapons of mass destruction from the Middle East. One way to direct petrodollars to the US economy has been to encourage arms sales. Currently, Bush is proposing to sell \$18 billion worth of arms to his Middle East allies, with the Export-Import Bank underwriting purchases, at below-market rates if necessary, a hidden tax to benefit major sectors of industry. Military victories by the US and its Israeli client have long been used as an export-promotion device. Corporations may hire showrooms to display their goods; the government hires the Sinai and Iraqi deserts.⁵

⁴ Paul Lewis, NYT, Jan 12, 1991; UN Draft A/44/L.51, 6 Dec. 1989.

⁵ AP, April 13, 1990. Reuters, BG, April 14, 1990. FT, March 9; Clyde Farnsworth, NYT, March 18, 1991.

munist East Europe, Saddam Hussein is different. That concludes the argument. We now understand why it was proper to pursue "quiet diplomacy" while our South African friends caused over \$60 billion in damage and 1.5 million deaths from 1980 to 1988 in the neighboring states — putting aside South Africa and Namibia, and the preceding decade. They are basically decent folk, like us and the Communist tyrants. Why? No answer is offered here, but a partial one is suggested by Nelson Mandela, who condemns the hypocrisy and prejudice of the highly selective response to the crimes of the "brown-skinned" Iraqis. The same thought comes to mind when the New York Times assures us that "the world" is united against Saddam Hussein, the most hated man in "the world" — the world, that is, minus its darker faces.⁴²

The emergence of Western racism with such stunning clarity is worth notice. It is an understandable consequence of the end of the Cold War. For 70 years, it has been possible to disguise traditional practices as "defense against the Soviets," generally a sham, now lost as a pretext. We return, then, to earlier days when the New York press explained that "we must go on slaughtering the natives in English fashion, and taking what muddy glory lies in the wholesale killing til they have learned to respect our arms. The more difficult task of getting them to respect our intentions will follow."⁴³ In fact, deprived of the benefits of our form of civilization, they understood our intentions well enough, and still do.

⁴² Ash, "The Gulf in Europe," NYRB, March 7, 1991. "Inter-Agency Task Force, Africa Recovery Program/Economic Commission, South African Destabilization: the Economic Cost of Frontline Resistance to Apartheid, NY, UN, 1989, 13, cited by Merle Bowen, Fletcher Forum, Winter 1991. Mandela, AP, NYT, Nov. 8, 1990. Editorials, NYT, Feb. 23, 27, 1991.

⁴³ See *Turning the Tide*, 162.

reason is a sign of totalitarian values, and citizens who reject these values will have to turn elsewhere to discover the real reasons. In the mainstream, they would find very little.

Outside official circles, the standard justification for war was that sanctions would not work and that it was unfair to allow the Kuwaitis to suffer on. Some held that debate over sanctions was a standoff, perhaps irresolvable. By the same logic, the bombing of numerous other countries can at once be justified by mere assertion that nothing else will put an end to aggression, annexation, and human rights abuses. Transparently, all of this is nonsense, even if we ignore the evidence that sanctions had already worked. Indisputably, the burden of proof lies on those who call for the use of force, a heavy burden that was never met, or even seriously faced.

One could not seriously argue that the suffering of the victims in this case was more extreme than in numerous others for which force has never been proposed. Nor is there any merit to the argument that this case was different because of the annexation: putting aside the US-UK response to other cases of annexation, no less horrifying, the drive towards war continued unchanged after Iraqi withdrawal offers that the US did not risk pursuing. The claim that a peaceful settlement would not have destroyed Saddam's warmaking capacity is no more persuasive. Apart from the broader consequences of such an argument if taken seriously, the obvious procedure for eliminating this capacity would have been to explore the possibilities for regional disarmament and security arrangements (proposed by Iraq, rejected by the US, well before the invasion of Kuwait); and after his negotiated withdrawal from Kuwait, to refrain from providing Saddam with lavish high technology assistance for his warmaking capacity, surely a possibility if the West could overcome its greed in this sole instance. Other arguments are equally weighty.

In one of the more serious efforts to address some of the questions, Timothy Garton Ash asserts in the New York Review that while sanctions were possible in dealing with South Africa or Com-

There are no plausible grounds for optimistic expectations now that the great power that has kept the peace process "hypothetical" and has helped keep the region armed to the teeth is in an even stronger position than before to tell the world that "what we say goes."

The Administration has in fact taken pains to present itself as "surly master of the world." As the ground campaign opened, New York Times correspondent Maureen Dowd quoted a leaked section of a National Security Policy Review from the first months of the Bush presidency, dealing with "third world threats." It reads: "In cases where the U.S. confronts much weaker enemies, our challenge will be not simply to defeat them, but to defeat them decisively and rapidly." Any other outcome would be "embarrassing" and might "undercut political support."⁶

"Much weaker enemies" pose only one threat to the United States: the threat of independence, always intolerable. For many years, it was possible to disguise the war against Third World nationalism with Cold War illusions, but that game is over and the real story is bright and clear: the primary target has always been Third World independence, called "radical nationalism" or "ultranationalism" in the internal planning record, a "virus" that must be eradicated.

The Times report makes no reference to peaceful means. That too is standard. As understood on all sides, in its confrontations with Third World threats, the US is "politically weak"; its demands will not gain public support, so diplomacy is a dangerous exercise. That is why the US has so commonly sought to keep diplomatic processes "hypothetical" in the Middle East, Central America, Indochina, and on other issues, and why it has regularly undermined the United Nations. Furthermore, political support at home is understood to be very thin. Naturally, one does not want to confront enemies that can fight back, but even much weaker enemies must

⁶ NYT, Feb. 23, 1991.

be destroyed quickly, given the weakness of the domestic base and the lessons that are to be taught.

These lessons are directed to several audiences. For the Third World, the message is simple: Don't raise your heads. A "much weaker" opponent will not merely be defeated, but pulverized. The central lesson of World Order is: "What we say goes"; we are the masters, you shine our shoes, and don't ever forget it. Others too are to understand that the world is to be ruled by force, the arena in which the US reigns supreme, though with its domestic decline, others will have to pay the bills.

The Lessons at Home

There is also a lesson for the domestic audience. They must be terrorized by images of a menacing force about to overwhelm us — though in fact "much weaker" and defenseless. The monster can then be miraculously slain, "decisively and rapidly," while the frightened population celebrates its deliverance from imminent disaster, praising the heroism of the Great Leader who has come to the rescue just in the nick of time.

These techniques, which have familiar precedents, were employed through the 1980s, for sound reasons. The population was opposed to the major Reagan policies, largely an extension of Carter plans. It was therefore necessary to divert attention to ensure that democratic processes would remain as "hypothetical" as the peace process. Propaganda campaigns created awesome chimeras: international terrorists, Sandinistas marching on Texas, narcotraffickers, crazed Arabs. Even Grenada was portrayed as a mortal threat, with fevered tales of an air base that would be used to attack the continent, huge Soviet military stores, and the threat to Caribbean sea lanes. Only a year ago, Noriega — a minor thug by international standards — was elevated to the status of Genghis Khan as the US prepared to invade Panama to restore the rule of

compromised."⁴¹ Accordingly, there can be no diplomacy, merely an ultimatum — capitulate or die — followed by the quick resort to violence.

Presented with this argument, the educated classes did not collapse in ridicule, but solemnly intoned the Party Line, expressing their awe and admiration for Bush's high principles. One would have to search far for the reaction that would be immediate on the part of any rational and minimally informed person: True, principle cannot be compromised, but since George Bush is a leading supporter of aggression and always has been, the principle invoked is not his, or his government's, or that of any other state. And it follows that no reason has been given at all for rejecting negotiations in favor of violence.

The specific words just quoted happen to be Bush's response to the Iraqi withdrawal proposal released by US officials on January 2. But the stance was maintained throughout. Intellectuals asked no questions, finding nothing to challenge in the farcical official pronouncements and the doctrine clearly implied: the world is to be ruled by force.

The conclusion is brilliantly clear: no official reason was offered for the war, and the educated classes suppressed the fact with near unanimity. We must look elsewhere to find the reasons for the war — a question of great significance for any citizen, though not for the guardians of doctrinal purity, who must bar this quest.

The methods adopted were enlightening. Those who had the indecency to demolish the official justifications were accused of demanding "moral purity," opposing any response to Iraq's aggression by states that had been "inconsistent" in the past (in fact, they had consistently pursued their own interests, generally supporting aggression for this reason). Returning to the realm of rational discourse, these miscreants were pointing out that war without stated

⁴¹ AP, Jan. 14, 1991; George Bush's letter to Saddam Hussein, NYT, Jan. 13, 1991.

erful, who never fail to strike impressive poses as they call for war crimes trials — for others.⁴⁰

The Political Culture

The published record tells us more about the political culture in the United States and the West generally. As noted, the possibility of a peaceful resolution was virtually banned from discussion. When George Bush thundered that *There Will Be No Negotiations*, a hundred editorials and news reports would laud him for “going the last mile for peace” in “extraordinary efforts at diplomacy.” Democratic forces in Iraq, with their unwanted message, were also successfully barred. Popular opposition to the war in most of the world was sporadically reported, but primarily as a problem: Can the friendly dictatorships control their populations while we gain our ends by force? Even among those who did not exalt the “martial values,” the totalitarian commitments were scarcely below the surface.

In the US, dissident voices were effectively excluded from the mainstream, as is the norm; and while the media elsewhere were far more open, support for the war on the part of the educated classes in the industrial democracies was so overwhelming that the effects were slight. Strikingly, no concern was voiced over the glaringly obvious fact that *no official reason was ever offered for going to war* — no reason, that is, that could not be instantly refuted by a literate teenager. That is the very hallmark of a totalitarian political culture.

The matter merits a closer look. After various failed efforts, one single official reason was offered for war, repeated in a litany by George Bush and his acolytes: “There can be no reward for aggression. Nor will there be any negotiation. Principle cannot be

⁴⁰ For details, see my *American Power and the New Mandarins* (Pantheon, 1969), 210–1; *Towards a New Cold War* (Pantheon, 1982), 112–3. On Tokyo, see Barton Bernstein, *International Security*, Spring 1991.

the 10% white minority and to ensure that the Canal Treaty, or some remnant of it, will not interfere with US control over the Canal and the military bases there. Government-media Agitprop has had some success. The tourism industry in Europe repeatedly collapsed while Americans cower in terror, afraid to travel to European cities where they would be 100 times as safe as they are at home, eliciting much derision in the right-wing European press.

In the Old World Order, the Soviet threat was skillfully deployed to mobilize public support for intervention abroad and for subsidies to high tech industry at home. These basic institutional requirements remain a policy guide, and they have their consequences. During Bush’s two years in office, real wages continued to decline, falling to the level of the late 1950s for non-supervisory workers (about 2/3 of the work force). Three million more children crossed the poverty line. Over a million people lost their homes. Infant mortality increased beyond its already scandalous levels. Federal spending dropped for education and for non-military R&D. Government, corporate and household debt continued to rise, in part concealed with various budgetary scams. Financial institutions drowned in red ink, following the S&Ls, set on their course by the Deregulation Task Force headed by George Bush. The gap between rich and poor grew to postwar record levels. Civic services collapsed further while the US took a healthy lead worldwide in prison population per capita, doubling the figure during the Reagan-Bush years, with black males now four times as likely to be in prison as in South Africa. And the “third deficit” of unmet social and economic needs (repairing infrastructure, etc.) is calculated at some \$130 billion annually, omitting the S&Ls.⁷

As inspection of its domestic programs makes clear, the Administration has no intention of addressing such problems; rightly, from

⁷ Figures from Robert Reich, *Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 30; Joshua Cohen, “Comments on the War,” MIT, March 4; Erich Heinemann, *CSM*, April 2, 1991. Prison population, Maurice Briggs, *Chicago Sun-Times*, Jan. 9; Tom Wicker, *NYT*, Jan 9, 1991.

its point of view. Any serious measures would infringe upon the prerogatives of its constituency. For the executives of a transnational corporation or other privileged sectors, it is important for the world to be properly disciplined, for advanced industry to be subsidized, and for the wealthy to be guaranteed security. It does not matter much if public education and health deteriorate, the useless population rots in urban concentrations or prisons, and the basis for a livable society collapses for the public at large.

For such reasons, it is important to distract the domestic population. They must join their betters in admiring “the stark and vivid definition of principle...baked into [George Bush] during his years at Andover and Yale, that honor and duty compels you to punch the bully in the face” — the words of the awe-struck reporter who released the Policy Review explaining how to deal with “much weaker enemies.”⁸

The principle that you punch the bully in the face — when you are sure that he is securely bound and beaten to a pulp — is a natural one for advocates of the rule of force. It teaches the right lessons to the world. And at home, cheap victories deflect the attention of a frightened population from domestic disasters while the state pursues its tasks as global enforcer, serving the interests of the wealthy. Meanwhile, the country continues its march towards a two-tiered society with striking Third World features.

The same Times reporter goes on to quote the gallant champion himself: “By God, we’ve kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all.” The second national newspaper joined in, applauding the “spiritual and intellectual” triumph in the Gulf: “Martial values that had fallen into disrepute were revitalized,” and “Presidential authority, under assault since Vietnam, was strengthened.” With barely a gesture towards the dangers of overexuberance, the ultraliberal Boston Globe hailed the “victory for the psyche” and the new “sense of nationhood and projected power” under the leadership of

⁸ Maureen Dowd, NYT, March 2, 1991.

ern sectors of North Vietnam, or elsewhere in Indochina, no one important cared, and the rule was that “anything goes.” The Pentagon Papers reveal extensive planning about the bombing of the North, because of potential costs to the US; the far more devastating bombing of the South, begun years earlier and including major war crimes, is passed over with little attention.³⁹

The same was true of World War II. At the end, Japan was defenseless, therefore demolished at will. Tokyo was removed from the list of atom bomb targets because it was “practically rubble” so that an attack would not demonstrate the bomb’s power. Many believe that the war ended with the atom bomb. Not so. In the official US Air Force history, we read that General Arnold “wanted as big a finale as possible,” and, with management skills that compare to Stormin’ Norman’s, assembled over 1000 planes to bomb Japan after Nagasaki, killing thousands of people and dropping leaflets saying “Your Government has surrendered. The war is over!” Truman announced Japan’s surrender before the last planes returned. Japan was prostrate, so why not? As the Korean war ground on, the Air Force could locate no more targets. Therefore, as an official US Air Force study records, it attacked North Korean dams, leading to such stirring sights as a “flash flood [that] scooped clean 27 miles of valley below,” while 75% of the water supply for rice production was wiped out and the enemy suffered “the destruction of their chief sustenance — rice.” “The Westerner can little conceive the awesome meaning which the loss of this staple food commodity has for the Asian,” the study explains: “starvation and slow death, ...more feared than the deadliest plague. Hence the show of rage, the flare of violent tempers, and the avowed threats of reprisals when bombs fell on five irrigation dams.” The threats of reprisal were empty, and there were no political costs, so these war crimes joined the long list of others compiled with impunity by the pow-

³⁹ For a detailed review, see my *For Reasons of State* (Pantheon, 1973).

Saddam Hussein. This is apart from the tens of thousands of civilians killed, the destruction of four hospitals, thousands of homes and other civilian structures by bombing, and other goals readily – and of course heroically – achieved when the the “much weaker enemy” is entirely defenseless.³⁷

Had the diplomatic track that Washington feared been successfully pursued, Kuwait too would have been spared the war and the Iraqi terror, which, according to reports, rapidly increased in the final days. An environmental catastrophe would also have been averted. In the small print, the Times noted that according to Pentagon officials, “the burning of Kuwait’s oil fields might have been a defensive action by Iraq, which appeared to be anticipating imminent attack by allied ground forces.” While Iraq created the largest oil spill, the one that threatened the desalination plant at Safaniya in Saudi Arabia probably resulted from US bombing, US military officials said. A Pentagon official added that the Iraqi oil spill might have been aimed at the water sources for US troops, in retaliation for US destruction of Kuwait’s major desalination plant just before. The prime responsibility for the Gulf tragedy lies on the shoulders of Saddam Hussein; but he is not without his partners in crime, nor are his crimes unique.³⁸

Some commentators expressed qualms about the savagery of the final slaughter, but a look at history should have relieved their surprise. When violence is cost-free, all bars are down. During the Indochina war, there were constraints on bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong, or dikes in North Vietnam, because of fear of a Chinese or Soviet reaction and the political cost elsewhere. But in the south-

³⁷ World Health Organization, WP, Feb. 26, NYT, Feb. 26, 1991. International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), AP, Feb. 28; David Nyhan, BG, March 3, 1991. Paul Lewis, NYT, March 2; Trevor Rowe, BG, March 2, 1991. For a detailed accounting, see V.K. Ramachandran, *Frontline* (India), March 30, 1991.

³⁸ Andrew Rosenthal, NYT, Feb. 23; AP, BG, Feb. 9; Pamela Constable, BG, Jan 27, 1991.

a man who is “one tough son of a bitch,” a man with “the guts to risk all for a cause” and a “burning sense of duty,” who showed “the depth and steely core of his convictions” and his faith that “we are a select people, with a righteous mission in this earth,” the latest in a line of “noble-minded missionaries” going back to his hero Teddy Roosevelt – who was going to “show those Dagos that they will have to behave decently” and to teach proper lessons to the “wild and ignorant people” standing in the way of “the dominant world races.” Liberal columnists praised “the magnitude of Bush’s triumph” over a much weaker enemy, dismissing the “uninformed garbage” of those who carp in dark corners (Thomas Oliphant). The open admiration for fascist values is a matter of some interest.⁹

For 20 years, there have been vigorous efforts to “kick the Vietnam syndrome,” defined by Reaganite intellectual Norman Podhoretz as “the sickly inhibitions against the use of military force.” He thought the disease was cured when we were “standing tall” after our astounding victory in Grenada. Perhaps that triumph of martial virtues was not enough, but now, at last, we have kicked these sickly inhibitions, the President exults. “Bush’s leadership has transformed the Vietnam Syndrome into a Gulf Syndrome, where ‘Out Now!’ is a slogan directed at aggressors, not at us” (Thomas Oliphant); we were the injured party in Vietnam, defending ourselves from the Vietnamese aggressors, from “internal aggression” as Adlai Stevenson explained in 1964. Having overcome the Vietnam syndrome, we now observe “the worthy and demanding standard that aggression must be opposed, in exceptional cases by force,” Oliphant continues – but, somehow, we are not to march on Jakarta, Tel Aviv, Damascus, Washington, Ankara, and a long series of other capitals.¹⁰

⁹ E.J. Dionne, WP Weekly, March 11; John Aloysius Farrell, BG Magazine, March 31; Martin Nolan, BG, March 10; Oliphant, BG, Feb. 27, 1991. Roosevelt, see my *Turning the Tide* (South End, 1985), 61, 87.

¹⁰ Oliphant, op. cit.

The ground had been well prepared for overcoming this grave malady, including dedicated labors to ensure that the Vietnam war is properly understood — as a “noble cause,” not a violent assault against South Vietnam, then all of Indochina. When the President proclaims that we will no longer fight with one hand tied behind our backs, respectable opinion asks only whether we were indeed too restrained in Indochina, or whether our defense of freedom was always a “lost cause” and a “mistake.” It is “clear,” the New York Times reports, that “the lesson of Vietnam was a sense of the limits of United States power”; in contrast, the lesson of Afghanistan is not a sense of the limits of Soviet power. Reviewing the “heroic tale” of a Vietnamese collaborator with the French colonialists and their American successors, the Times describes the methods he devised in 1962 to destroy the “political organization” of the South Vietnamese revolutionaries. The most successful device was to send “counter-terror teams to track down and capture or kill recalcitrant Vietcong officials” — *counter-terror teams*, because it was the US and its clients who were assassinating civilians to undermine an indigenous political organization that far surpassed anything the US could construct, as fully conceded.¹¹

So effectively has history been rewritten that an informed journalist at the left-liberal extreme can report that “the US military’s distrust of cease-fires seems to stem from the Vietnam War,” when the Communist enemy — but not, apparently, the US invaders — “used the opportunity [of a bombing pause] to recover and fight on” (Fred Kaplan). Near the dissident extreme of scholarship, the chairman of the Center for European Studies at Harvard can inform us that Nixon’s Christmas bombing of Hanoi in 1972 “brought the North Vietnamese back to the conference table” (Stanley Hoffmann). Such fables, long ago demolished, are alive and well, as the propaganda system has elegantly recovered; no real problem

¹¹ Peter Applebome, NYT, March 1; Terrence Maitland, NYT Book Review, Feb. 3, reviewing Zalin Grant, *Facing the Phoenix*.

resisted the assault of 6000 elite US forces after Washington had ignored Cuba’s announcement that they would not fire unless attacked, and its call for a peaceful resolution. This time, the heroic General explained, we would take no chances. The tactic was to pulverize the Third World peasant army — hiding in the sand, immobile, and defenseless — after months of disinformation about its artillery, sophisticated defenses, chemical weapons, and other fantastic capacities, later conceded to be largely fakery. When the enemy was utterly demoralized, US forces cut off escape, the Air Force slaughtered those attempting to flee (including Asian workers and Kuwaiti hostages, BBC reported),³⁶ and troops were sent it to pick up the pieces — though elite Iraqi units were allowed to move on to crush later revolts with savage terror, in accord with the US aim of reconstructing something rather like the friendly regime of the pre-August 1990 period, but now with firmer guarantees of obedience to the master.

The air war had already reduced Iraq to a “pre-industrial age,” creating “near apocalyptic” conditions, a UN survey reported. The air attack was aimed at civilian targets, called “military” for the purpose: water, sewage, and power systems, bridges and infrastructure generally. The results, as expected, were the effective destruction of the health system so that limbs have to be sawed off without anesthesia among other harrowing scenes in what remains of hospitals; mounting deaths from disease and lack of food and water, with huge increase in infant diarrheal infections and other serious diseases; water down to 5% of normal supply; food rations at 1000 calories with further crises impending; and the likelihood of major epidemics from what amounts to biological warfare. The Times reported that the US opposes any “premature relaxation” of these conditions, insisting that the civilian population be held hostage in the expectation that if they suffer enough, they might remove

³⁶ BBC-1 TV news, 9 PM, March 5; BBC radio, cited by Christopher Hitchens, *Nation*, April 8.

mode has eroded: no more Marines chasing Sandino, or US forces marauding for years in the Mekong Delta. Either proxy forces must be used, as in the international terror networks of the Reagan-Bush years, or victory must be “rapid and decisive.” And a “much weaker enemy” can be attacked only if it is first demonized and built to awesome dimensions by vast propaganda campaigns. By the same token, those who hope to narrow the options for violence and state terror must find ways to clear away the rubble under which the reality of the world has been buried. It is not an easy task, but the task of raising consciousness never is, and it has been pursued effectively under circumstances that most of us can barely imagine.

The War

The war followed the script laid out for confrontations with a “much weaker enemy.” A ground war was avoided. US combat casualties were on the scale of Grenada, while Iraqi military deaths are estimated by the US military at 1–200,000, killed from a safe distance. The victors bulldozed corpses into mass graves, in violation of the Geneva Conventions to which they appeal when some interest is served. But the laws of war are as relevant as they were in earlier days, when the New York Times cheerily described how helicopter gunships would attack the “dazed and bleeding people” surrounding B-52 bomb craters in Vietnam and “put them out of their misery,” honoring the law that soldiers unable to fight “shall in all circumstances be treated humanely.”³⁵

In a briefing, General Schwartzkopf observed that during the Grenada invasion, the Cubans fought harder than expected — referring to the several dozen paramilitary construction workers who

³⁵ Walter S. Mossberg and David Rogers, WSJ, March 22; Holly Burkhalter, Washington director of Human Rights Watch, LAT, March 12; News, Middle East Watch, March 7, 1991. Malcolm Browne, NYT, May 6, 1972; see E.S. Herman and N. Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent* (Pantheon, 1988), 193, for longer quote and context.

among the educated classes, who had rarely strayed from the Party Line. Americans generally estimate Vietnamese deaths at about 100,000, a recent academic study reveals. Its authors ask what conclusions we would draw about the political culture of Germany if the public estimated Holocaust deaths at 300,000, while declaring their righteousness. A question we might ponder.¹²

The Leader and his Teachings

George Bush’s career as a “public servant” also has its lessons concerning the New World Order. He is the one head of state who stands condemned by the World Court for “the unlawful use of force”; in direct defiance of the Court, he persisted in the terror and illegal economic warfare against Nicaragua to prevent a free election in February 1990, then withheld aid from his chosen government because of its refusal to drop the World Court suit. Bush dismisses with contempt the Court’s call for reparations for these particular crimes (others are far beyond reach), while he and his sycophants solemnly demand reparations from Iraq, confident that respectable opinion will see no problem here.

Or in the fact that in March 1991, the Administration once again contested World Court jurisdiction over claims resulting from its crimes; in this case, Iran’s request that the Court order reparations for the downing of an Iranian civilian airliner in July 1988 by the US warship *Vincennes*, part of the naval squadron sent by Reagan and Bush to support Iraq’s aggression. The airbus was shot down in a commercial corridor off the coast of Iran with 290 people killed — out of “a need to prove the viability of Aegis,” its high tech missile system, in the judgment of US Navy commander David Carlson, who “wondered aloud in disbelief” as he monitored the events

¹² Kaplan, BG, Feb. 23; Hoffmann, BG, Jan. 6, 1991. Sut Jhally, Justin Lewis, & Michael Morgan, *The Gulf War: A Study of the Media, Public Opinion, & Public Knowledge*, Department of Communications, U Mass. Amherst.

from his nearby vessel. Bush further sharpened our understanding of the sacred Rule of Law in April 1990, when he conferred the Legion of Merit award upon the commander of the *Vincennes* (along with the officer in charge of anti-air warfare) for “exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding service” in the Gulf and for the “calm and professional atmosphere” under his command during the period when the airliner was shot down. “The tragedy isn’t mentioned in the texts of the citations,” AP reported. The media kept a dutiful silence — at home, that is. In the less disciplined Third World, the facts were reported in reviews of US terrorism and “U.S. imperial policy” generally.¹³

Bush opened the post-Cold War era with the murderous invasion of Panama. Since he became UN Ambassador in 1971, the US is far in the lead in vetoing Security Council resolutions and blocking the UN peacekeeping function, followed by Britain — “our lieutenant (the fashionable word is partner),” in the words of a senior Kennedy advisor.¹⁴ Bush took part in the Reaganite campaign to undermine the UN, adding further blows during the Gulf crisis. With threats and bribery, the US pressured the Security Council to wash its hands of the crisis, authorizing individual states to proceed as they wished, including the use of force (UN Resolution 678). The Council thus seriously violated the UN Charter, which bars any use of force until the Council determines that peaceful means have been exhausted (which, transparently, they had not, so no such determination was even considered), and requires further that the Security Council — not George Bush — will determine what further means may be necessary. Having once again subverted the UN, the US compelled the Security Council to violate its rules by refusing repeated requests by members for meetings to deal with the mount-

¹³ Chicago Tribune, March 6, 1991; Carlson, U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, September 1989; Los Angeles Times, Sept. 3, 1989; AP, April 23, 1990; Third World Resurgence, Oct. 1990.

¹⁴ Mike Mansfield, cited by Frank Costigliola, in Thomas Paterson, ed., *Kennedy’s Quest for Victory* (Oxford, 1989).

supporting culture has largely been swept away. “Scientific methods of strike-breaking” rallied community support against the disruptive elements that interfered with the “harmony” to which “we” are devoted — “we” being the corporate executive, the honest sober worker, the housewife, the people united in support of “Americanism.” Huge media campaigns wielding vacuous slogans to dispel the danger of thought are now a staple of the ideological system. To derail concern over whether you should *support their policy*, the PR system focuses attention on whether you *support our troops* — meaningless words, as empty as the question of whether you support the people of Iowa. That, of course, is just the point: to reduce the population to gibbering idiots, mouthing empty phrases and patriotic slogans, waving ribbons, watching gladiatorial contests and the models designed for them by the PR industry, but, crucially, not thinking or acting. A few must be trained to think and act, if only to serve the needs of the powerful; but they must be kept within the rigid constraints of the ideological system. These are the tasks of the media, journals of opinion, schools and universities.

They have been accomplished with much distinction. To approach any serious question, it is first necessary to clear away mountains of ideological rubble. But the triumph is far from complete, far less so than a generation ago. Outside elite circles, the indoctrination is thin, and often is cast aside with surprising ease if people have an opportunity to think. Skepticism and disbelief are barely below the surface. Where there are even fragments of organization, many have been able to defend themselves from the ideological onslaught. The famed “gender gap” is an example. The opportunities for association and independent thought offered by the womens’ movement have led to a dramatic shift in attitudes — or, perhaps, willingness to express long-held attitudes — over the past two decades. The same is true of church groups, solidarity organizations, and others.

The political leadership and others who hail the martial virtues know well that the domestic base for intervention in the traditional

system. The facts having been consigned to their appropriate obscurity, the slogans can be trumpeted, unchallenged.

Deterring US Democracy

Such examples, readily extended, illustrate the success in suppressing democracy in the United States. The ideal, long sought by the business community and the political class, is that the general population should be marginalized, each person isolated, deprived of the kinds of associations that might lead to independent thought and political action. Each must sit alone in front of the tube, absorbing its doctrinal message: trust in the Leader; ape the images of the “good life” presented by the commercials and the sitcoms; be a spectator, a consumer, a passive worker who follows orders, but not a participant in the way the world works. To achieve this goal, it has been necessary to destroy unions and other popular organizations, restrict the political system to factions of the business party, and construct a grand edifice of lies to conceal every relevant issue, whether it be Indochina, Central America, the Middle East, terrorism, the Cold War, domestic policy, ..., whatever — so that the proper lessons are on the shelf, ready when needed.

The methods have been refined over many years. The first state propaganda agency was established by the Woodrow Wilson administration. Within a few months, a largely pacifist population had been turned into a mob of warmongers, raging to destroy everything German and later backing the Wilson repression that demolished unions and independent thought. The success impressed the business and intellectual communities, leading to the doctrines of “manufacture of consent” and the elaboration of methods to reduce the general public to its proper spectator role. When the threat of popular democracy and labor organizing arose again in the 1930s, business moved quickly to destroy the virus, with great success. Labor’s last real legislative victory was in 1935, and the

ing crisis, rules that the US had angrily insisted were “mandatory” when it objected to brief delays in earlier years. In further contempt for the UN, the US bombed Iraqi nuclear facilities, proudly announcing the triumph shortly after the General Assembly reaffirmed the long-standing ban against such attacks and called upon the Security Council “to act immediately” if such a violation occurs; the vote was 144–1, the US in splendid isolation as usual (Dec. 4, 1990).¹⁵

Bush was called to head the CIA in 1975, just in time to support near-genocide in East Timor, a policy that continues with critical US-UK support for General Suharto, whose achievements even dim the lustre of Saddam Hussein. Meanwhile, exhibiting his refined taste for international law, Bush looks the other way as his Australian ally arranges with the Indonesian conqueror to exploit Timorese oil, rejecting Portugal’s protest to the World Court on the grounds that “There is no binding legal obligation not to recognize acquisition of territory by force” (Foreign Minister Gareth Evans). Furthermore, Evans explains, “The world is a pretty unfair place, littered with examples of acquisition by force...”; and in the same breath, following the US-UK lead, he bans all official contacts with the PLO with proper indignation because of its “consistently defending and associating itself with Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait.” Recognizing that the monumental cynicism might disrupt the posturing about international law and the crime of aggression, the ideological institutions have protected the public from such undesirable facts, keeping them in the shadows along with a new Indonesian military offensive in Timor under the cover of the Gulf crisis, and the Western-backed Indonesian operations that may wipe out a million tribal people in Irian Jaya, with thousands of victims of chemical weapons among the perhaps 300,000 already killed, according to human rights activists and the few observers.¹⁶

¹⁵ Michael Tomasky & Richard McKerrow, *Village Voice*, Feb. 26, 1991.

¹⁶ Reuters, Canberra, Feb. 24; *Communique*, International Court of Justice, Feb. 22, 1991. Evans, Senate Daily Hansard, Nov. 1, 1989; Indonesia News Ser-

The attention of the civilized West is to be focused, laser-like, on the crimes of the official enemy, not on those we could readily mitigate or eliminate, without tens of thousands of tons of bombs.

On becoming Vice-President, Bush travelled to Manila to pay his respects to another fine killer and torturer, Ferdinand Marcos, praising him as a man “pledged to democracy” who had performed great “service to freedom,” and adding that “we love your adherence to democratic principle and to the democratic processes.” He lent his talents to the war against the Church and other deviants committed to “the preferential option for the poor” in Central America, now littered with tortured and mutilated bodies, perhaps devastated beyond recovery. In the Middle East, Bush supported Israel’s harsh occupations, its savage invasion of Lebanon, and its refusal to honor Security Council Resolution 425 calling for its immediate withdrawal from Lebanon (March 1978, one of several). The plea was renewed by the government of Lebanon in February 1991,¹⁷ ignored as usual while the US client terrorizes the occupied region and bombs elsewhere at will, and the rest of Lebanon is taken over by Bush’s new friend Hafez el-Assad, a clone of Saddam Hussein.

Another friend, Turkish president Turgut Ozal, was authorized to intensify Turkey’s repression of Kurds in partial payment for his services as “a protector of peace,” in Bush’s words, joining those who “stand up for civilized values around the world” against Saddam Hussein. While making some gestures towards his own Kurdish population and attempting to split them from Iraqi Kurds, Ozal continues to preside over “the world’s worst place to be Kurdish” (Vera Saeedpour, director of the New York-based program

vice, Nov. 1, 1990; Greenleft mideast.gulf.346, electronic communication, Feb. 18, 1991. ABC (Australia) radio, “Background briefing: East Timor,” Feb. 17, 1991. Robin Osborne, *Indonesia’s Secret Wars* (Allen & Unwin, 1985); George Monbiot, *Poisoned Arrows* (Abacus, London, 1989); Anti-Slavery Society, *West Papua* (London, 1990).

¹⁷ NYT, Feb. 19, 1991.

withdrawal from Kuwait. The question was framed to minimize a positive response, stressing that the Bush administration opposed the idea.³³ It is a fair guess that each person who nevertheless advocated such a settlement assumed that he or she was isolated in this opinion. Few if any had heard any public advocacy of their position; the media had been virtually uniform in following the Washington Party Line, dismissing “linkage” (i.e., diplomacy) as an unspeakable crime, in this unique case. It is hardly likely that respondents were aware that an Iraqi proposal calling for a settlement in these terms had been released a week earlier by US officials, who found it reasonable; or that the Iraqi democratic forces, and most of the world, took the same stand.

Suppose that the crucial facts had been known and the issues honestly addressed. Then the 2/3 figure would doubtless have been far higher, and it might have been possible to avoid the huge slaughter preferred by the administration, with its useful consequences: the world learns that it is to be ruled by force, the dominant role of the US in the Gulf and its control over Middle East oil are secured, and the population is diverted from the growing disaster around us. In brief, the educated classes and the media did their duty.

The academic study of attitudes and beliefs cited earlier revealed that the public overwhelmingly supports the use of force to reverse illegal occupation and serious human rights abuses. But, like journalists and others who proudly proclaim this “worthy standard,” they do not call for force in a host of cases that at once come to mind. They do not applaud Scud attacks on Tel Aviv, though Saddam’s sordid arguments compare well enough to those of his fellow-criminal in Washington, if honestly considered; nor would they approve bombs in Washington, a missile attack on Jakarta, etc.³⁴ Why? Again, because of the triumphs of the ideological

³³ WP, Jan. 11, 1991.

³⁴ See notes 12, 10.

with timing: should Iraq withdraw one day after a cease-fire, as the Soviet-Iraqi proposal stated, or while the bombing continued, as the US demanded.³¹

Throughout, the media went along, with scarcely a false note.

The record strongly supports the judgment of Reagan insider James Webb, former Navy Secretary, one of the few critics of the war to gain a public forum. In the *Wall Street Journal*, he wrote that “this administration has dealt in extremes,” favoring “brute force” over other means. Bush “relentlessly maneuvered our nation into a war” that was unnecessary. He chose to turn the country into “the world’s Hessians,” a mercenary state paid by others while “our society reels from internal problems” that the administration refuses to address.³²

This record is, again, highly informative. The possibility of a negotiated settlement was excluded from the political and ideological systems with remarkable efficiency. When Republican National Committee Chairman Clayton Yeutter states that if a Democrat had been President, Kuwait would not be liberated today, few if any Democrats can respond by saying: If I had been President, Kuwait might well have been liberated long before, perhaps by August, without the disastrous consequences of your relentless drive for war. In the media, one will search far for a hint that diplomatic options might have been pursued, or even existed. The mainstream journals of opinion were no different. Those few who felt a need to justify their support for the slaughter carefully evaded these crucial issues, in Europe as well.

To evaluate the importance of this service to power, consider again the situation just before the air war began. On January 9, a national poll revealed that 2/3 of the US population favored a conference on the Arab-Israeli conflict if that would lead to Iraqi

³¹ Thomas Friedman and Patrick Tyler, *NYT*, March 3; Transcript of Moscow Peace Proposal and Bush-Fitzwater statements, *NYT*, Feb. 23; Patrick Tyler, *NYT*, Feb. 26, 1991.

³² Webb, *WSJ*, Jan. 31, 1991.

that monitors Kurdish human rights). Journalists, the Human Rights Association in the Kurdish regions, and lawyers report that this protector of civilized values has made use of his new prestige to have his security forces expel 50,000 people from 300 villages, burning homes and possessions so that the people will not return, and fire on anti-war demonstrators, while continuing the torture that is standard procedure in all state security cases. The Frankfurt relief organization Medico International reported in late January that hundreds of thousands of Kurds were in flight from cities near the Iraqi frontier, with women, children and old people trying to survive the cold winter in holes in the ground or animal sheds while the government bars any help or provisions, the army is destroying fields with flame throwers, and jet planes are bombing Kurdish villages. Human Rights Watch reports that in mid-August, Turkey officially suspended the European Convention on Human Rights for the Kurdish provinces, eliminating these marginal protections with no protest from any Western government, while the army “stepped up the village burnings and deportations.” Censorship is so extreme that the facts remain obscure, and lacking ideological utility, are of no interest in any event.¹⁸

Plainly, we have here a man who can be expected to “breathe light” into the problems of the Middle East. If we prefer the facts, we may derive further conclusions about the New World Order.

¹⁸ Reuters, Sept. 26, 1990. Saeedpour, *Pacific News Service*, March 11, 1991; John Murray Brown, *Financial Times*, Feb. 12, March 8, 1991; AP, March 20, 1991; Michael Gunter, *Kurdish Times*, Fall 1990; Ray Moseley, *Chicago Tribune*, Feb. 6, 1991. Medico International, *Krieg und Flucht in Kurdistan*, Frankfurt, citing *Tageszeitung*, Jan. 28 and *Frankfurter Rundschau*, Jan. 25, on the bombing. Human Rights Watch #1, Winter, 1991.

The Background to the War

Prior to August 2, 1990, the US and its allies found Saddam Hussein an attractive partner. In 1980, they helped prevent UN reaction to Iraq's attack on Iran, which they supported throughout. At the time, Iraq was a Soviet client, but Reagan, Thatcher and Bush recognized Saddam Hussein as "our kind of guy" and induced him to switch sides. In 1982, Reagan removed Iraq from the list of states that sponsor terror, permitting it to receive enormous credits for the purchase of US exports while the US became a major market for its oil. By 1987, Iraq praised Washington for its "positive efforts" in the Gulf while expressing disappointment over Soviet refusal to join the tilt towards Iraq (Tariq Aziz). US intervention was instrumental in enabling Iraq to gain the upper hand in the war. Western corporations took an active role in building up Iraq's military strength, notably its weapons of mass destruction. Reagan and Bush regularly intervened to block congressional censure of their friend's atrocious human rights record, strenuously opposing any actions that might interfere with profits for US corporations or with Iraq's military build-up.¹⁹

Britain was no different. When Saddam was reported to have gassed thousands of Kurds at Halabja, the White House intervened to block any serious congressional reaction and not one member of the governing Conservative Party was willing to join a left-labor condemnation in Parliament. Both governments now profess outrage over the crime, and denounce those who did protest for appeasing their former comrade, while basking in media praise for

¹⁹ See my articles in Z magazine, March and October 1990, Feb. 1991, and *Detering Democracy* (Verso, forthcoming). For further reports (lacking sources, hence difficult to evaluate), see Pierre Salinger and Eric Laurent, *Guerre du Golfe* (Olivier Orban, Paris, 1991); Adel Darwish and Gregory Alexander, *Unholy Babylon* (St. Martin's, 1991). Also Don Oberdorfer, WP Weekly, Stuart Auerbach, WP Weekly, March 18–24; Michael Massing, New York Review, March 28; Helga Graham, South, Feb. 1991.

quashed the threat at once.²⁹ The story continued. On the eve of the air war, the US and UK announced that they would veto a French proposal for immediate Iraqi withdrawal in exchange for a meaningless Security Council statement on a possible future conference; Iraq then rejected the proposal as well. On February 15, Iraq offered to withdraw completely from Kuwait, stating that the withdrawal "should be linked" to Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories and Lebanon, in accord with UN resolutions. The Iraqi Ambassador to the UN stated that the offer was unconditional, and that the terms cited were "issues" that should be addressed, not "conditions" involving "linkage." The State Department version, published in the New York Times and elsewhere, mistranslated the Iraqi offer, giving the wording: "Israel must withdraw..." Washington at once rejected the offer, and the Ambassador's comments, which were barely noted in the press, were ignored. The US insisted that Iraqi withdrawal must *precede* a cease-fire; Iraqi forces must leave their bunkers and be smashed to pieces, after which the US might consider a cease-fire. The media seemed to consider this quite reasonable.³⁰

Washington's plan was to launch the ground operation on February 23. Problems arose when the Soviet Union, a day earlier, reached an agreement with Iraq to withdraw if UN resolutions would then be cancelled. The President, "having concluded that the Soviet diplomacy was getting out of hand" (as the Times puts it), brusquely dismissed the final Soviet-Iraq agreement, quickly changing the topic to the charge of an Iraqi "scorched-earth policy." Again, the crucial difference between the two positions had to do

²⁹ See my articles in Z magazine, October 1990 and February 1991, for details; and Parry, op. cit.

³⁰ The translation by AP from Cyprus and by the BBC was accurate. AP, BG, Feb. 16; BBC, FT, Feb. 16; State Dept. version, NYT, Feb. 16, Time, Feb. 25. See also William Beeman, PNS, Feb. 18. Original obtained by Edward Said. Iraqi Ambassador, NYT, Feb. 17, 1991, 100 words. John Cushman, "U.S. Insists Withdrawal Comes Before Cease-Fire," NYT, Feb. 16, 1991.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry adds further details. The offer, relayed via Iraqi Deputy Foreign Minister Nizar Hamdoon, reached Washington on August 9. According to a confidential Congressional summary, it represented the views of Saddam Hussein and other Iraqi leaders. On August 10, the proposal was brought to the National Security Council, which rejected it as “already moving against policy,” according to the retired Army officer who arranged the meeting. Former CIA chief Richard Helms attempted to carry the initiative further, but got nowhere. Further efforts by Hamdoon, the Iraqi Embassy in Washington, and US interlocutors elicited no response. “There was nothing in this [peace initiative] that interested the US government,” Helms said. A Congressional summary, with an input from intelligence, concludes that a diplomatic solution might have been possible at that time. That we will never know. Washington feared that it was possible, and took no chances, for the reasons expressed through the Times diplomatic correspondent.

From the outset, the US position was clear, unambiguous, and unequivocal: no outcome will be tolerated other than capitulation to force. Others continued to pursue diplomatic efforts. On January 2, US officials disclosed an Iraqi proposal to withdraw in return for agreement of an unspecified nature on the Palestinian problem and weapons of mass destruction. US officials described the offer as “interesting” because it mentioned no border issues, taking it to “signal Iraqi interest in a negotiated settlement.” A State Department Mideast expert described it as a “serious prenegotiation position.” The facts were again reported by Knut Royce of Newsday, who observed that Washington “immediately dismissed the proposal.” A Times report the next day suggested that mere statement by the Security Council of an intention to deal with the two “linked” issues might have sufficed for complete Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait. Again, the US was taking no chances, and

their high principle.²⁰ It was, of course, understood that Saddam Hussein was one of the world’s most savage tyrants. But he was “our gangster,” joining a club in which he could find congenial associates. Repeating a familiar formula, Geoffrey Kemp, head of the Middle East section in the National Security Council under Reagan, observed that “We weren’t really that naive. We knew that he was an SOB, but he was our SOB.”

By mid-July 1990, our SOB was openly moving troops towards Kuwait and waving a fist at his neighbors. Relations with Washington remained warm. Bush intervened once again to block congressional efforts to deny loan guarantees to Iraq. On August 1, while intelligence warned of the impending invasion, Bush approved the sale of advanced data transmission equipment to his friendly SOB. In the preceding two weeks, licenses had been approved for \$4.8 million in advanced technology products, including computers for the Ministry of Industry and Military Industrialization, for the Saad 16 research center that was later destroyed by bombing on grounds that it was developing rockets and poison gas, and for another plant that was repeatedly bombed as a chemical weapons factory. The State Department indicated to Saddam that it had no serious objection to his rectifying border disputes with Kuwait, or intimidating other oil producers to raise the oil price to \$25 a barrel or more. For reasons that remain unexplained, Kuwait’s response to Iraqi pressures and initiatives was defiant and contemptuous.²¹

The available evidence can be read in various ways. The most conservative (and, in my view, most plausible) reading is that Saddam misunderstood the signals as a “green light” to take all of Kuwait, possibly with the intention of setting up a puppet government behind which he would keep effective power (on the model of the US in Panama and many other cases), possibly as a bargaining

²⁰ Darwish, *op. cit.*, 79; Tony Benn, et al., letter, *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, March 31, 1991.

²¹ Auerbach, Salinger, Darwish, *op. cit.*

chip to achieve narrower ends, possibly with broader goals. That was unacceptable: no independent force is permitted to gain significant control over the world's major energy reserves, which are to be in the hands of the US and its clients.

Saddam's record was already so sordid that the conquest of Kuwait added little to it, but that action was a crime that matters: the crime of independence. Torture, tyranny, aggression, slaughter of civilians are all acceptable by US-UK standards, but not stepping on our toes. The standard policies were then set into motion.

Deterring Iraqi Democracy

Throughout these years, Iraqi democratic forces opposing Bush's comrade were rebuffed by the White House, once again in February 1990, when they sought support for a call for parliamentary democracy. In the same month, the British Foreign Office impeded their efforts to condemn Iraqi terror, for fear that they might harm Anglo-Iraqi relations. Two months later, after the execution of London Observer correspondent Farzad Bazoft and other Iraqi atrocities, Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd reiterated the need to maintain good relations with Iraq. Iraqi Kurds received the same treatment. In mid-August, Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani flew to Washington to seek support for guerrilla operations against Saddam's regime. Neither Pentagon nor State Department officials would speak to him, even though such operations would surely have weakened Iraq's forces in Kuwait; he was rebuffed again in March 1991. The reason, presumably, was concern over the sensibilities of the Turkish "defender of civilized values," who looked askance at Kurdish resistance.²²

²² Sources in London-based Iraqi democratic opposition; Darwish, op. cit. Talabani, Vera Saeedpour, *Toward Freedom* (Burlington, VT), March 1991; Stephen Hubbell, *Nation*, April 15, 1991.

blocked by the great powers, in the past several decades, primarily the United States, with Britain second; these powers account for 80% of Security Council vetoes in the 20 years of George Bush's national prominence. Since the US and UK happened to oppose Iraq's aggression, sanctions could be invoked, with unusually high prospects for success because of their unprecedented severity and the fact that the usual violators — the US, UK, and their allies — would, for once, adhere to them. The likelihood of success was stressed by virtually all witnesses at the Nunn Senate Hearings (including former Defense Secretaries and chairmen of the Joint Chiefs), as well as by academic specialists on sanctions. The question whether sanctions would have worked may be idle; quite possibly they already *had* worked by late December, perhaps mid-August. That seems a reasonable interpretation of the Iraqi withdrawal proposals confirmed or released by US officials.

Washington moved resolutely to bar the success of peaceful means. Following the prescriptions of the National Security Policy Review, it ensured that this "much weaker enemy" would be punished by force. On August 22, New York Times chief diplomatic correspondent Thomas Friedman outlined the Administration position: the "diplomatic track" must be blocked, or negotiations might "defuse the crisis" at the cost of "a few token gains" for Iraq, perhaps "a Kuwaiti island or minor border adjustments." A week later, Knut Royce revealed in *Newsday* that a proposal in just those terms had been offered by Iraq, but was dismissed by the Administration (and suppressed by the Times, as it quietly conceded). The proposal, regarded as "serious" and "negotiable" by a State Department Mideast expert, called for Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait in exchange for access to the Gulf (meaning control over two uninhabited mudflats that had been assigned to Kuwait in the imperial settlement, leaving Iraq landlocked) and Iraqi control of the Rumailah oil field, about 95% in Iraq, extending two miles into Kuwait over an unsettled border.

the answer: he was fishing in Florida. Turkey was accused by Kurdish leaders of blocking food shipments to starving Kurds, and later closed its borders to most of those in flight. US forces turned back people fleeing the terror in the South, and refused even to provide food and water to those who had escaped, Reuters reported, though individual soldiers did so. A senior Pentagon official said: "The bottom line here is, if you're suggesting we would stay purely for a purpose of protecting the refugees, we won't." "We are under no obligation to them," another added. Our job is to destroy, nothing more. The US and Britain barred efforts to have the UN Security Council condemn the massacre, let alone act in any way, until it was too late to matter.²⁷

So profound is Bush's commitment to the principle of noninterference that he also could lend no support to Kuwaiti democrats. His delicacy barred mention of the word "democracy" even in private communications to the Emir, officials explained. "You can't pick out one country to lean on over another," one said; never will you find the US "leaning on" Nicaragua or Cuba, for example, or moving beyond the narrowest interpretation of international law and UN initiatives.²⁸

Those who find any of this strange are simply unacquainted with standard procedures and the reasons for them.

Blocking the Diplomatic Track

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait fell within the range of many other recent atrocities. The regular response of the international community is condemnation, followed by sanctions and diplomatic efforts. These procedures rarely succeed, or even begin, because they are

²⁷ Jim Drinkard, AP, April 3; Geraldine Brooks, WSJ, April 3; Michael Kransh, BG, April 4; Walter Robinson, BG, March 21; Paul Taylor, Reuters, March 21 (Mideast Mirror, March 21); LA Times, April 2; Christopher Marquis, BG, April 3; Paul Lewis, NYT, April 3, 1991.

²⁸ Andrew Rosenthal, NYT, April 3, 1991.

It is a very revealing fact that the Iraqi democratic opposition was not only ignored by Washington but also scrupulously excluded from the media, throughout the Gulf crisis. That is easily explained when we hear what they had to say.

On the eve of the air war, the German press published a statement of the "Iraqi Democratic Group," conservative in orientation ("liberal," in the European sense), reiterating its call for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein but also opposing "any foreign intervention in the Near East," criticizing US "policies of aggression" in the Third World and its intention to control Middle East oil, and rejecting UN resolutions "that had as their goal the starvation of our people." The statement called for the withdrawal of US-UK troops, withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait, self-determination for the Kuwaiti people, "a peaceful settlement of the Kuwait problem, democracy for Iraq, and autonomy for Iraq-Kurdistan." A similar stand was taken by the Teheran-based Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (in a communique from Beirut); the Iraqi Communist Party; Mas'ud Barzani, the leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party; and other prominent opponents of the Iraqi regime, many of whom had suffered bitterly from Saddam's atrocities. Falih 'Abd al-Jabbar, an Iraqi journalist in exile in London, commented: "Although the Iraqi opposition parties have neither given up their demand for an Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait nor their hope of displacing Saddam some time in the future, they believe that they will lose the moral right to oppose the present regime if they do not side with Iraq against the war." They called for reliance on sanctions, which, they argued, would prove effective. "All the opposition parties are agreed in calling for an immediate withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait," British journalist Edward Mortimer reports, "but most are very unhappy about the military

onslaught by the US-led coalition” and prefer economic and political sanctions. They also condemned the murderous bombing.²³

A delegation of the Kuwaiti democratic opposition in Amman in December took the same position, opposing any Western assault against Iraq. On British television, anti-Saddam Arab intellectuals in London, including the prominent Kuwaiti opposition leader Dr. Ahmed al-Khatib, were unanimous in calling for a cease-fire and for serious consideration of Saddam’s February 15 peace offer. In October 1990, Dr. al-Khatib had stated that Kuwaitis “do not want a military solution” with its enormous costs for Kuwait, and strenuously opposed any military action.²⁴

The silence here was deafening, and most instructive. Unlike Bush and his associates, the peace movement and Iraqi democratic opposition had always opposed Saddam Hussein. But they also opposed the quick resort to violence to undercut a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Such an outcome would have avoided the slaughter of tens of thousands of people, the destruction of two countries, harsh reprisals, an environmental catastrophe, further slaughter by the Iraqi government and the likely emergence of another murderous US-backed tyranny there. But it would not have taught the crucial lessons, already reviewed. With the mission accomplished, the disdain for Iraqi democrats continues unchanged. A European diplomat observes that “The Americans would prefer to have another Assad, or better yet, another Mubarak in Baghdad,” referring

²³ “For a Peaceful Settlement,” Gruppe Irakischer Demokraten, Frankfurter Rundschau, Jan. 14; al-Jabbar, Manchester Guardian Weekly, Feb. 3; Mortimer, FT, Jan. 21, 1991.

²⁴ Lamis Andoni, FT, Dec. 6, 1990. David Pallister, Guardian (London) Feb. 18, 1991. Khatib, Middle East Report, Jan/Feb. 1991, cited by Mouin Rabbani, letter, New Statesman, March 22, 1991, replying to Fred Halliday. The quote is from Khatib’s interview with Halliday, who advocated war, also claiming that it was supported by the populations of the region, which is untrue, as far as we know, and hardly relevant; no one, including Halliday, relies on regional attitudes to justify the use of force against Israel to remove it from Lebanon and the occupied territories.

to their “military-backed regimes” (dictatorships, that of Assad being particularly odious). “This may account for the fact that thus far, the administration has refused to meet with Iraqi opposition leaders in exile,” Jane Friedman reports in the Christian Science Monitor. A diplomat from the US-run coalition says that “we will accept Saddam in Baghdad in order to have Iraq as one state,” which might be interpreted as meaning: to prevent Iraqi democracy.²⁵

In mid-March, Iraqi opposition leaders alleged that the US favors a military dictatorship, insisting that “changes in the regime must come from within, from people already in power” (Leith Kubba, head of the London-based Iraqi Democratic Reform Movement). Banker Ahmed Chalabi, another prominent opposition activist, said that “the United States, covered by the fig leaf of non-interference in Iraqi affairs, is waiting for Saddam to butcher the insurgents in the hope that he can be overthrown later by a suitable officer,” an attitude rooted in the US policy of “supporting dictatorships to maintain stability.” Official US spokesmen confirmed that the Bush administration had not talked to any Iraqi opposition leaders and did not then intend to: “We felt that political meetings with them...would not be appropriate for our policy at this time,” State Department spokesman Richard Boucher stated on March 14.²⁶

These judgments were confirmed in the following weeks. Bush had openly encouraged uprisings against Saddam Hussein, and, according to intelligence sources, had authorized the CIA in January to aid rebels — secretly, perhaps to avoid offending his Turkish and Saudi friends. But he stood by quietly as Saddam slaughtered Shi’ites and Kurds, tacitly approving the use of helicopter gunships to massacre civilians, refusing to impede the terror or even to provide humanitarian aid to the victims. Fleeing refugees bitterly asked journalists “Where is George Bush,” probably not knowing

²⁵ CSM, March 20, 1990.

²⁶ Mideast Mirror (London), March 15, 1991.