

The Gulf: Beyond False Victories

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It is now necessary to go beyond this period of little glory, to leave behind the facile clichés of War, in order to return to what is essential, that is to say the policies which have produced and may again produce such bloody scenarios. Certainly, the task is long and arduous and American impatience notorious, so American leadership must give way to a truly international, and above all European, effort to correct the misdeeds of American militarism posing as policy and to organise the ensuing peace. Four issues seem to me foremost. For convenience I shall treat them alphabetically:

1) *Democratisation*: A democratic government in Baghdad would certainly not have constructed the complex deadlock in which Saddam had trapped his country and would not therefore have carried out an unjustifiable aggression against its small neighbour. It is but a small step from this observation to the conclusion that democratic regimes would stabilise the region. The West has always been happy to make the point - but this time only to be rapidly disillusioned. The two countries which had established an effective multiparty system at the time of the crisis (Algeria and Jordan) produced the two "routes" most favourable to Iraq.

That is to say that democracy is not in itself an immunisation against such slips. Whether or not they have the right to express themselves freely, Arabs are hardly willing to ignore the Palestinian issue, to accept excessive inequality between neighbour countries, or to resign themselves to a marginal role on the world stage. Democracy is not therefore a restraint on nationalist demands and the latter are not simply clichés manipulated by dictators. There is a deep, authentic refusal to acknowledge Arab disunity, the maldistribution of wealth, and the injustice committed upon the Palestinians. Democratisation may prevent governments exploiting these causes but it would only reinforce their appeal to the people. Such would be the "utility" of a democratic regime and such would be its limits.

2) *International Law*: Since the beginning of the crisis, all references to the legal issues sound false. Few are the authors who have had the courage to raise the interests at stake, which would have been both more exact and

more convincing. In reality, for years now this region has suffered from the flaunting of international resolutions, of the principles of sovereignty and of the basic rules of noninterference in the affairs of others. However, a dozen resolutions on Kuwait did have an immediate effect. Self-determination for the Kuwaitis seemed much more urgent than for other nationalities still hoping for recognition. Truth was evident for the Gulf, but error remains all around.

Here also therefore it is necessary to remember what is essential. First, in the words of the Secretary General of the UN, "the war of the Allies is a legitimate war, it is not the war of the United Nations" (as foreseen in its charter) and it is irrefutably a war. Next, that this apparent submission to International Law is circumstantial. It would be enough for the aggressor to be a permanent member of the Council for its veto to prevent the impressive unanimity exercised against Iraq. Events in the Baltic states have demonstrated this clearly enough even in the midst of the Gulf crisis. Thus, the enforcement of International Law in this case is fortuitous and quite selective: Unless a similar determination is exercised on other ongoing conflicts in the region, the mantle of International Law will hardly be exportable in the future.

To this pointed question arising from the region, one may answer that if we must begin to apply legal principles somewhere, the brutality of the Iraqi aggression made Kuwait an ideal point of departure. That may be. How long must we now wait for a second illustration of this new world order based on International Law and on international pressure if not sanctions against other occupying countries and other expansionists? To win the peace, we must pass through here: through the demonstration a posteriori that in Kuwait International Law was more than simply a skilful disguise, a convenient fig-leaf for national interests, made possible by the embarrassment of the USSR. Otherwise the conclusion is inescapable: International Law can no longer serve as a point of reference and the Security Council will be perceived as simply a rubber stamp in the service of the currently dominant superpower in international politics.

3) *Proliferation*: Enough has been said on the terrible weapons of Saddam Hussein. The latest resolution of the Security Council has just achieved through self-mutilation what the bombings had already accomplished: to deprive Iraq of its missiles (those of a range above 150 km), of its chemical and bacteriological weapons and of any nuclear ambitions it may have had. In view of the use to which Iraq put its "technological advances" against civilian populations, but not against enemy armies, such severity is welcome.

Is this the problem? Is it not rather the fact that in the last decade the Middle East has undergone a dangerous proliferation of ballistic technology and of weapons of mass destruction? This allowed Iraq to use gas, Libya to send two unfortunate Scuds towards Lampedusa, Saudi Arabia to buy missiles of a range of 4500 km, Iran to accumulate a chemical arsenal and a nuclear programme perhaps more advanced than that of its Iraqi neighbour and, last but not least, Israel to develop a programme that is at once nuclear, chemical, bacteriological, ballistic, antiballistic and spatial.

One may answer that Iraq, having used chemical warfare against its own population and having threatened to do so against Israel, was the ideal candidate for a starting point at which to impose a halt to this proliferation. That may be. However, none of the military plans harboured by other countries in the region have paused before the punishment inflicted on Baghdad. Just the opposite, as the Patriot has made a triumphant commercial debut, North Korea is delivering even more advanced missiles (Scud C) to Syria, Iranian projects are continuing in full swing and Israel demands everything and denies itself nothing.

The punishment inflicted on Iraq has not produced a moment's hesitation to reflect on the conclusion: Europe has implicitly resigned itself to the fact that ballistic weapons and arms of mass destruction will multiply in its neighbourhood. This geographical proximity should be cause for thought, as it was capable of generating panic among the inhabitants of the Southern European states who asked themselves whether the Iraqi missiles could reach the Côte d'Azur. The issue is not as naive as this. Truth is, Saddam was not a despot crazy about weapons but a Middle East leader engaged, along with all his neighbours, in an arms race which grows more and more dangerous as it infests the whole region and which, unfortunately, has the financial means to support itself and enough insoluble conflicts to justify its expenses.

To such a regional problem there can only be a regional solution: To constrain, while modernising and generalising where possible the controls on the export of ballistic technology. Ultimately, the denuclearisation of the region is desirable and still, no doubt, within reach. Pragmatically, a solution by which Israel is granted exclusive nuclear capability in exchange for its withdrawal from the occupied territories is a possibility. But there can be nothing worse than this disorganised race, sustained by oil revenues and external aid, now disguised by the punishment of a single participant. The exchange of American military aid to Israel and Egypt for their signature on the Camp David Accords of 1978 should invite reflection on the effective meaning of certain kinds of peace.

4) *Wealth*: Saddam Hussein presented himself as Robin Hood; the Gulf states reminded him, with reason, that having unthinkingly dissipated the riches of his own country (and indirectly of theirs) he could not self-appointed himself defender of the poor. The issue is closed but, here too, the problem remains untouched. Egyptians and Syrians are not less sensitive to this discussion than Iraqis or Jordanians. The redistribution of wealth is an issue dating from before the Kuwait affair and one that will survive it.

This wealth has been substantially damaged by the costs of the war. However, two problems remain. The first is objective: One cannot reasonably expect the coexistence of countries as poor as Sudan or Somalia alongside countries as rich as Kuwait and the Arab Emirates. The second is ideological: The local political culture is so profoundly marked by the existence of a superior legitimacy (Arab and/or Islamic) compared to that of modern states that the waiter in an Egyptian or Tunisian cafe considers himself in some sense proprietor of oil reserves that Divine Will has placed in certain sections of the Arab and Islamic world and not in others.

The oil producing countries have responded to this double problem by financial transfers, on a more or less regular basis, generous or conditional, and, indirectly, by the remittances of immigrant workers to their country of origin. But these two forms of transfer have diminished with the fall of oil revenues beginning in 1983, just as the rest of the region underwent a mix of demographic explosion, chaotic urbanisation and economic recession. Beyond the no doubt welcome recovery of oil prices, it is not only a matter of re-establishing these intra-regional financial flows, but also of a much more complex prospect. The objectives should be to favour multilateral aid rather than the strongly politicised bilateral form; to avoid penalising populations for the attitudes taken by their governments during this crisis, which is today a dominating temptation in the Gulf; to encourage investment, especially private investment, rather than simply government aid.

But the crucial point is the ultimate destination of this aid: The Gulf states have devoted much of their "aid" to the construction of enormous military-security complexes in the region which have blocked democratisation without contributing to the economic development of the countries which "benefited." One of these military machines - the Iraqi - has just been used against one of its creditors - Kuwait. It remains to be seen whether the Gulf states will draw the appropriate conclusion: to redirect their aid towards development rather than, as they are tempted, to repudiate the principle of contributing to an integrated regional development. The Western states which have liberated Kuwait are in a privileged position to draw this to their attention.

Will the triumphant West do so? The Kissinger inspiration in Bush's policy is too perceptible to really hope so. While it is difficult at present to advance credible numbers, history will perhaps tell one day that the American bombings destroyed Iraq and, by so doing, provoked a rebellion and internal repression which killed more civilians (perhaps more Iraqis all-told) than the war itself. History may also tell that faced with three possible solutions (to impose increasingly constraining sanctions against Iraq, to march on Baghdad, or to strike Iraq and then stop to "observe" a bloody civil war), the Bush administration dismissed the first and the most wise, avoided the second and the most daring, and adopted the third and probably the worst. I say this in the hope of reminding Europeans not only that such a waste was avoidable but also that it could still be repaired.

(Translation by Paolo Guarda, EUI)