



New World Order

War Of The Imagination

Is the new order a world of *Pax Americana*?
Mary Kaldor discusses the long term
significance of the Gulf war

The crisis in the Gulf is a reminder that war changes everything. As yet nobody knows what its ramifications will be, though it is clear they will be enormous. In our features section, a team of specialists analyse the meaning and long-term implications of the war. **Mary Kaldor** and **Neal Ascherson** look at what the Gulf war might mean for the new world order.

ness. Compared with all those other invasions - China in Tibet, Indonesia in East Timor, Israel in the Lebanon, etc - it was heartwarming to witness the way in which the world community was taking a stand against an act of gross injustice and imposing unprecedented economic sanctions. So what went wrong? How did this global co-operation degenerate into a war led by the United States and Britain? How did the United Nations get hijacked into becoming an institution for war-making? How is it possible that what will prove to be an act of technological genocide has been carried out in the name of international law?

Some would argue that the answer is the Western interest in oil, that the United States and Britain cynically exploited moral abhorrence at Saddam Hussein's behaviour. After all, Western countries had earlier supported Iraq in the war with Iran, even though it was started by an illegal Iraqi act of aggression. Douglas Hurd, writing in *The Guardian* (January 24, 1991) cheerfully admits the interest in oil. After occupying Kuwait, he argues, Iraq controls 18% of the world's oil reserves. And if it were to invade Saudi Arabia, it would control 44% of the world's oil reserves. But, in that case, would it not have been enough to defend Saudi Arabia and maintain the pressure on Saddam Hussein through sanctions? Surely, this war is doing greater damage to global oil supplies than a hard currency starved Iraq would have done?

A more plausible explanation has to do with the end of the cold war. This war has to be explained in terms of the collapse of the old order - not simply in the sense that the United States was left as the only superpower, but in the more profound sense that the collapse of the old order has far-reaching consequences for American society and politics, that this war is a defensive reaction to the deep disturbance caused by the end of the cold war. To develop this explanation and to assess the consequences of the war, it is necessary to understand how the world order was organised up to 1989.

The cold war was a way of organising global relations. The orthodox construction of the cold war, shared by both Left and Right, is that it was a deep-rooted conflict between East and West. It was the threat of military power, deterrence, that prevented war from breaking out. Left and Right differed only on the nature of this conflict. For the Right, this was a conflict between freedom and totalitarianism. For the Left, this was a conflict between capitalism and socialism. Alternatively, for both Left and Right, this was a form of great power rivalry. There is another way of understanding the cold war, not as a conflict but as a kind of collusion, although the term 'collusion' perhaps implies too much conscious purpose. There were two distinct systems in East and West: the Fordist variant of capitalism, and

the Stalinist or post-stalinist variant of socialism. But they were not in conflict. They needed each other, they complemented each other, they were bound together in a joint world order that defined the period 1948-1989.

The military confrontation which represented this world order has to be viewed not as deterrence but as imaginary war. It was not that both sides were preparing for some future war to deter the other side. Rather, both sides were conducting a war in the imagination. Day after day, in military exercises, scenarios, games of espionage and hostile rhetoric, both sides behaved as though the second world war had never ended. And this had profound consequences for the functioning of each system. The second world war had solved certain intractable economic and social problems. The imaginary war, at least for the first 20 years after the war, reproduced the solutions of the second world war. It created a wartime atmosphere which could be used to manage the economy and to generate social cohesion.

For the West, the imaginary war could be said to have defined the era of Fordist capitalism. It could be described as the Fordist method of international political regulation. This is not to say that it was the consequence of the rise of Fordism (ie, the changes that were taking place during the first half of the 20th century in capitalist methods of production). Rather, it was a way of coping with some of the contradictions thrown up by the rise of Fordism. It came about not for economic reasons but as a consequence of complex political processes. Many of the characteristics of the post-war period which we associate with Fordism, for example, high levels of military spending or private consumption, could just as well be explained in terms of the political institutions which shaped the Fordist era.

The second world war had solved the problems of the 1930s depression. It resulted in a massive increase in government spending both in the United States and in Europe and it created a bipartisan consensus, a sense of political solidarity both domestically and among allies, in the pursuit of shared war aims. Immediately after the war, the United States moved politically to the right and Europe moved dramatically to the left - the prewar establishments had been discredited by appeasement and collaboration. Postwar elections resulted in left governments or left-leaning coalitions in all European countries. The United States cut back on government spending and on financial support to its former allies, despite the fact that the allies were economically devastated and desperate for dollars both because of fiscal conservatism and the leftist nature of the new European governments.

The cold war was a way of recreating a bipartisan consensus and a sense of allied solidarity, at least between America and Britain. The New Dealers in the

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How did we get into this war? It is only a year since the cold war ended. This time last year, most of us believed that we were on the threshold of a new era of peace and co-operation in international affairs. How was that mood of optimistic euphoria so rapidly smashed? How is it that the United States' (and British) military machine - more American troops and weapons than in Europe at the height of the cold war - is pounding away, day after day, at a low-tech Third World enemy?

Of course, it was a great achievement that the United Nations reacted so promptly to the invasion of Kuwait by a dictator capable of almost infinite nasti-

United States were able to mobilise support for big government by emphasising the Soviet threat. The Social Democrat and Labour Parties of western Europe were able to establish their respectability by emphasising their distance from the communists. And this new-found cohesion between governments in the United States and western Europe provided a political framework for the regulation of the international economy (including its financial, trade, and technological aspects) and the spread of Fordism, as well as a method whereby the US was persuaded to spend its surplus dollars.

Ido not want to suggest that Stalin had nothing to do with the origins of the cold war. On the contrary, the occupation of eastern Europe and the brutal behaviour of the Red Army was a vital ingredient. It is unlikely that the West could have done anything, at that stage, to prevent the communist takeovers in the late-1940s. Agreement on Germany and the provision of Marshall Aid without strings might have led to a different outcome. However, the division of Germany, the decision to create a West German state, and the establishment of Nato provided a legitimisation for the Soviet role in eastern Europe - and vice versa.

The height of the cold war was also the period which has come to be known as the golden age of capitalism. Detente and the new cold war in the 1970s and the 1980s can be viewed as different ways of reacting to the end of the golden age, the faltering of the Fordist formula for capitalist expansion, and the emergence of new policies of capitalist accumulation in West Germany and Japan, based on new post-Fordist technologies.

Vietnam was the turning point. It is no accident that 1971 was the year of the first US trade deficit, the year that the US devalued the dollar and abandoned the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates, and also the year that Nixon and Kissinger went to Moscow and initiated detente. Vietnam was a real war and real wars are much more unpredictable than imaginary wars. Vietnam polarised political opinion instead of recreating social cohesion. Vietnam was expensive; whereas, at the time of Korea, there was a dollar shortage, and increased spending by the United States merely stimulated the American economy, at the time of Vietnam, increased spending led to inflation and a trade deficit.

From the 1970s onwards, the cold war increasingly became an obstacle to economic and political stability. The Atlanticist compromise was challenged from the Left by the new social movements which emerged in the aftermath of Vietnam. And it was criticised on the Right by neo-liberals who favoured a more liberal form of capitalism. American military spending no longer facilitated the expansion of the world economy; instead, it became an obstacle to financial regulation. Because military spending absorbed scientific and technologi-

cal resources, it contributed to the decline in the competitiveness of American products and, hence, a decline in the US ability to manage the world economy. Essentially, the cold war preserved American power structures and so prevented the emergence of a new set of political institutions which could regulate the post-Fordist global economy, and which could manage and respond to the dramatic changes in the balance of the world economy as a result of the introduction of new methods of production, especially in Japan and Western Europe, based on the intensive use of information technologies.

The imaginary war consisted of a real military confrontation, with real soldiers, real weapons and using real resources. The strategies, and the weapons designed for them, that were acted out on the north German plains bore a marked resemblance to the actual experience of the second world war. Civil technology changes continuously in response to changing needs as signalled in the market place. Military technology changes dramatically in wartime, in response to experience on the battlefield. In peacetime military technology tends towards inertia. New inventions are applied only in so far as they fit existing missions and strategies determined in previous wars.

The second world war was a Fordist war. A combination of mass production and the internal combustion engine was responsible for the Allied victory. It was the ability of the United States and the Soviet Union to outproduce Germany that was critical. The monthly aircraft production of Ford's Willow Run Factory was half the peak monthly output of the entire German airframe industry. The war was characterised by mobile offensive operations. The invention of the tank and the aircraft broke through the defensive stalemate that had characterised the first world war.

The Korean war was very similar. In the imaginary war in Europe, both sides re-enacted the style and missions of the second world war. If there were asymmetries on both sides, this is to be explained in terms of the differences on the Western and Eastern fronts. It is as though they were not fighting each other but some phantom German army. This is particularly evident in relation to nuclear weapons. For the US and Britain, nuclear weapons were imagined as terror weapons, as an extension of strategic bombing missions. Intercontinental missiles were viewed as pilotless bombers. The Russians had undertaken little bombing during the war. (Indeed they viewed strategic bombing as barbarous.) For them, nuclear weapons were regarded as an extension of artillery, which had been so crucial in the second world war.

The wars in Vietnam and the Middle East introduced a new dimension into strategic calculation. There had been an enormous increase in the accuracy and

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destructiveness of all munitions, owing to the introduction of information technologies. Attrition rates for tanks and aircraft increased greatly, sparking off a debate about the implications of the new technologies. One school of thought argued that mobile, offensive operations were no longer possible and future wars would be more like the first world war than the second. The best that could be achieved in western Europe was a dispersed defensive strategy which would bog down an offensive, in case of war, and so give time for negotiation. These ideas were taken up by the peace movement in the early-1980s as an alternative to reliance on nuclear weapons. And they also formed the basis for Gorbachev's concept of 'reasonable sufficiency' and for the way in which the negotiations on conventional force reductions in Europe were conducted.

The other school of thought argued that offensive operations remained important and that military technology had to be designed to protect offensive missions and to swamp the defensive with area destruction munitions. Concepts like Emerging Technology, Air-Land Battle, or Deep Strike, involved more complex aircraft with all sorts of electronic counter-measures for protection, the use of various kinds of surface-to-surface and air-to-surface missiles, and a mixture of nuclear, chemical and conventional munitions. Some of the conventional munitions are said to be equivalent in immediate destructiveness to nuclear weapons.

The choice between these two schools of thought could not be based on rational calculations, since these two different approaches could not be tried out in war. In practice, the choice was made on subjective grounds, reflecting the institutional preferences of military planners. Therefore, it was the offensive school which won the procurement battle, and it is these new offensive technologies which are being used in the Gulf war. These technologies could be said to be neo-Fordist - that is they make use of information technologies but within a framework determined in the Fordist era.

If we understand the cold war as imaginary war, a situation in which the Fordist variant of capitalism needed the Stalinist variant of socialism, in which the two systems were propped up by a never-ending pretend confrontation, then the collapse of communism was bound to lead to a dramatic reaction in the West. The Gulf war could be described as the struggle for control of the post-cold war world order - a bid to retain American leadership, to establish a form of political regulation of the post-Fordist world economy that retains the Fordist political institutions.

Long before the Gulf crisis, American, British and French ministries of defence were warning about the new threat from the South - the increase in missiles and chemical weapons, the danger of fanatics, fundamentalists,

drug traffickers and so forth. In a remarkable speech, pulsating with mixed metaphors, given at Chatham House in June 1990, George Walden, the Conservative MP, captured the revolutionary impact of the collapse of communism on our institutions. Walden talked about the way in which Britain's role had been artificially inflated by the cold war: 'What could be better calculated to raise the national spirits than a government holding the flag high in the face of the evils of communism, the murderous follies of buffoonish Argentinian generals, and the intrigues of the perfidious French?'

'And now it is gone, all gone... the communists have thrown in the sponge and left us bouncing around in the ring looking for an opponent. With the exception of the Middle East,... Third World heat spots are cooling fast.'

The question naturally arises, what is British defence and diplomacy for now? In any other sphere of life, when the demand for your product collapses for reasons entirely beyond your control, you don't try to drum up new custom, you wind the business down and go into something more profitable.'

'But there is a disturbing feeling about that something irreversible may be happening in the world and it is not to Britain's advantage. Simply put, the fear is that... Britain's long day in the international sun may be waning; that we shall be forced to spend less time basking on summit slopes and more time digging the national allotment. With the passing of the cold war and the rise of a new Europe, a sense of hope is coupled, in the case of Britain, with a palpable sense of loss.'

If this is how the British were feeling, how much more palpable must have been the sense of loss in the United States, how much more disturbing the feeling that something irreversible was taking place. So many lives, careers, and worldviews had been vested in the cold war. The soul-searching that went on in the security community, in the think tanks and universities throughout the United States in 1990 gives some hint of that 'sense of loss'.

The Gulf war can be viewed as an attempt to reverse the irreversible. Just at the moment when the establishment figures on both sides of the Atlantic were talking about substantial cuts in military spending, when the role of the hawkish political leaders was being eclipsed, when the United States seemed to be floating away from its international role, and new self-confident Europe seemed to be on the verge of creation, Iraq invaded Kuwait. And the cold war procedures, routines and language sprang back into action. American troops were deployed more or less according to a plan, Operation 90-1002, developed in the early-1980s to contain a southward thrust by the Soviet Union. Bush droned on about good and evil, right and wrong, Hitler, Munich, appeasement, using all the same phrases that most of us thought

we had heard for the last time, after the revolutions of 1989. European unity disintegrated, the British-American special relationship was revived, the UN went along with US actions, and the Gulf war looked set to become the defining moment of the post-cold war order,

Empires in decline are often dangerous. Domestic power structures are sustained by the imperial role. Paul Kennedy's *The Rise And Fall Of Empires* struck a sensitive chord in the American body politic. Can the Gulf war establish a new international framework, dominated by the US, which would serve as a mechanism for international political regulation in a post-Fordist era? Certainly, it is possible to envisage such an outcome. There is something eerie about this war. It has been presented as remote and 'surgical' - a technological war of such precision that only military targets are hit and all we experience is a tv screen demonstrating the spectacular nature of the equipment, and the helplessness of Third World enemies.

If Saddam Hussein is easily defeated, if the show is a success, and the war does not lose its current popular appeal, then it is possible that the United States, Britain, Israel and Saudi Arabia will establish a permanent military presence in the Gulf. Already the Pentagon is drawing up plans for long-term containment, including the construction of training and recreational facilities for thousands of troops. Douglas Hurd has proposed the establishment of a Gulf Co-operation Council, with Western support, to contain Arab nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism.

The costs of a permanent military presence would be paid by Germany, Japan and oil-rich Arab allies, thus siphoning off excess savings to finance the permanent, long-term external deficits which are likely to be experienced by the US and Britain. It will be a neo-Fordist world in which the priorities of the Fordist era will determine the way in which new information technologies are utilised - a world in which the priorities are military spending and private consumption, and which is energy- and transport-intensive. It will be a stagnating world in which the costs of military adventures and private consumption bear most heavily on people in the Third World via high interest rates, high oil prices and the foregone peace dividend. And it will be an exclusivist world in which the rich countries insulate themselves from the pressure of migration, and the threat of terrorism.

The rich countries will consolidate around the banner of democracy against Saddam Hussein-type enemies in the Middle East, the Third world, and even perhaps in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Saddam Hussein may be defeated and even killed but the Saddam phenomenon will survive and may even be nurtured by the war. This is the phenomenon of fanaticism, fundamentalism, brutality and barbarism - a phen-

omenon which is a consequence of poverty, frustration and impotence in the face of dwindling resources and the destruction of traditional cultures, together with the readiness of the West to sell weapons and technology either for profit or for short-term geo-political interest. It is possible to envisage a new imaginary war between North and South, neo-Fordism and fundamentalism, modernity and monstrosity. These two distinct systems will feed upon each other through an ongoing confrontation acted out in the Middle East.

However, it could be that the Gulf war turns out to be more like Vietnam than Korea. It may be the last gasp of American imperialism in the face of decline. The Gulf war could instead mark the beginning of a kind of Western perestroika. First of all, it is very difficult to see how a renewed American hegemony can be sustained economically. This war is very expensive. United States military costs are estimated at \$60 billion so far, and UK military costs amount to some £90m, almost the same as the entire 1990/1 defence budget. It is the most costly spectacle on earth and it cannot be repeated again this century. Well over half the costs are being defrayed by Germany, Japan and the Gulf states. How long will these countries tolerate American deficits which would imply an intensifying global recession and an increased burden on eastern Europe and the Third World?

Secondly, it may be difficult to sustain American hegemony politically, both for international and domestic reasons. Western Europe and Japan may find it politically difficult to finance and support Anglo-American interventionism in the future. There has been reluctance in western Europe, up to now, to support the Anglo-American position in the Gulf. This has prompted taunts from the British and American press about the unwillingness of European countries to shoulder their responsibilities. Indeed, in Britain, the short-lived post-Thatcher pro-Europeanism has been dissipated in a wave of Atlanticism and jingoism - talk of political union now seems to be off the agenda. But in other west European countries a different conclusion is being drawn, namely that European political union, perhaps excluding Britain, is all the more important so as to provide a check on American behaviour, to avoid a unipolar world. In particular, in Spain, Italy and also Germany, there is much discussion about a Mediterranean CSCE (Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, better known as the Helsinki process) a long-term institutionalised process of dialogue and negotiation about all the problems of the region, which is seen as an alternative to Hurd's Gulf Co-operation Council.

The behaviour of states depends on domestic political processes. The success of the cold war formula had everything to do with the way in which, at

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