

Cover Story

Along The Color Line:

Blood For Oil: Behind The Gulf Crisis

Years from now people will wonder with amazement how and why the United States became embroiled in the Persian Gulf crisis. Because despite the rhetoric in the Congressional debate over granting President Bush the power to initiate warfare, and despite the media's constant coverage of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, the American people are more poorly informed about the reasons for this crisis than any other war in our history.

Let's begin with the essentials. The United States did not send American troops into the Gulf to "oppose aggression" or to defend "democracy" or support the right of Kuwait to resist Iraq's aggression. For decades, "aggression" has been a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy. Eight years ago, the U.S. launched a massive illegal invasion of Grenada, on the false pretext that American lives were endangered. Much of the world opposed U.S. aggression in Panama and the imposition of a puppet regime loyal to American interests. The American response was to veto several United Nations Security Council resolutions critical of the invasion.

Nor does the United States oppose "aggression" when it is committed by its allies. When Israel invaded neighboring Lebanon, bombing Beirut and killing about twenty thousand people, the United States vetoed security council moves denouncing this aggression. When racist South Africa institutionalized apartheid, murdered and imprisoned thousands of the regimes critics, and launched murderous invasions against Namibia, Angola, and Mozambique, the U.S. said virtually nothing. When Iran was our enemy a few years ago, the U.S. did nothing when Saddam Hussein gassed Kurdish

rebels in his country, the Reagan administration indirectly helped Iraq obtain sophisticated weapons to use against the Iranians.

It's also difficult to characterize the former regime in Kuwait as a bastion of democracy, or to applaud the current, corrupt monarchy of Saudi Arabia as a fortress for liberal values and beliefs. No one doubts that Saddam Hussein is a despotic dictator. But the same is also true for the Emir of Kuwait and the ruling class of Saudi Arabia. In Kuwait, the vast majority of the population were noncitizens, politically disfranchised. Censorship in the press was pervasive, and Kuwaiti dissidents claim that if the Emir ever reclaims power in his country again, that the level of political repression will be intensified. The Saudis have a long history of torture, executions, suppression of women's rights, and an absence of democracy.

Why is the United States fighting on the side of these despots? The crocodile tears being shed for the Kuwaitis who were murdered and raped by Saddam's troops explain nothing about George Bush's decision to send 400,000 troops into the Gulf, a force larger than the number of Americans who invaded Europe against Hitler in World War II. The basic reason is the political economy of oil, and the singular fact that Americans, who represent five percent of the world's population, consume conservatively 26 percent of all petroleum. The Saudis, the Kuwaitis, and the other oil rich sheiks are actually junior partners in a cooperate conglomerate system involving Wall Street, the multinational corporations and capitalist elites in the United States and Western Europe. Dependable control over cheap and reliable sources of energy is essential to the

cooperate and military hierarchies in this country. That's part of the reason why George Bush thinks it is cheaper to spill American blood in the sands of Kuwait than to give up domination and control over international oil sources.

Perhaps the biggest tragedy of the Gulf crisis was the manipulation of the nation by President Bush into a confrontational situation with Saddam's regime. A token American force, preferably united under United Nations command, would have been sufficient to halt Saddam from attacking Saudi Arabia. Bush's secret decision to double the number of American troops in the region, made before the 1990 Congressional elections but announced afterward, made a negotiated settlement almost impossible. Bush, not Saddam Hussein, made the confrontation inevitable.

Pushing the world to the edge of war, every action by the Bush administration was designed to make conflict with Iraq a national obsession. By resorting to locker room boasts, vowing to "kick Saddam's ass", Bush needlessly personalized the conflict, undercutting the possibility of negotiations. By increasing the number of American troops without Congressional authority, he transformed what was initially a defensive tripwire to check Iraqi aggression into an offensive force. At the United Nations, Bush refused any linkage between Kuwait and the occupation of the West Bank by Israel, although a regional security conference which connects the problems of the Mideast will be the only means to move toward peace. In Congress, Bush even asserted that he alone had the power to take the country into war, despite Constitutional provisions to the contrary.

In retrospect, years from now, the focus of the inquiry on the Gulf crisis will not be Saddam Hussein and the invasion of Kuwait. Rather, it will center on the domestic prerogatives of American political, military and cooperate power. All international politics is based on domestic realities. If we want to understand why the crisis in the Persian Gulf occurred, we need to analyze the system of American power.

In the aftermath of the Cold War, with the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, the United States was placed in a paradoxical situation. The \$300 billion military budget could no longer be justified, as domestic critics called for a "peace dividend", increased expenditures for education, jobs, health care, and human needs. With the retreat of Soviet troops from the center of Europe, it became difficult to justify the presence of thousands of American troops across the world.

Ideologically, the demise of the communist threat undermined the political consensus which united the forces of Reaganism. With the end of the Cold War, American conservatives no longer felt obligated to support Bush's domestic or foreign policies. By the summer of 1990, even before Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, there was significant evidence that America was slipping into a major economic recession. An external crisis was needed to divert the attention of Americans standing on unemployment lines and awaiting pink slips.

By sending 400,000 American troops into the Mideast, Bush accomplished several political objectives. First, American intervention reestablished this country's

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