

The American expedition to Baghdad, and world-wide reactions to the new imperium. From mass demonstrations against the war to the diplomatic hypocrisies colluding with it. The UN as framework of blockade and intervention yesterday, and mask of reconstruction tomorrow.

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RE-COLONIZING IRAQ

On 15 February 2003, over eight million people marched on the streets of five continents against a war that had not yet begun. This first truly global mobilization—unprecedented in size, scope or scale—sought to head off the occupation of Iraq being plotted in the Pentagon. The turnout in Western Europe broke all records: three million in Rome, two million in Spain, a million and a half in London, half a million in Berlin, over a hundred thousand in Paris, Brussels and Athens. In Istanbul, where the local authorities vetoed a protest march in the name of ‘national security’, the peace movement called a press conference to denounce the ban—to which ten thousand ‘journalists’ turned up. In the United States there were mass demonstrations in New York, San Francisco, Chicago and La and smaller assemblies in virtually every state capital: over a million people in all. Another half a million marched in Canada. The antipodean wing of the movement assembled 500,000 in Sydney and 250,000 in Melbourne.

On 21 March, as British and American forces headed across the Iraqi border, the long quiescent Arab street, inspired by these global protests, came to life with spontaneous mass demonstrations in Cairo, Sanaa and Amman. In Egypt, the mercenary regime of Hosni Mubarak panicked and arrested over 800 people, some of whom were viciously maltreated in prison. In the Yemen, over 30,000 people marched against the war; a sizeable contingent made for the US Embassy and had to be stopped with bullets. Two people were killed and scores injured. In the Israeli–American protectorate of Jordan, the monarchy had already crushed a virtual uprising in a border town and now proceeded to brutalize demonstrators in the capital. In the Arab world the tone of the streets was defiantly nationalist—‘Where is *our* army?’ cried Cairene protesters. In Pakistan the religious parties took full advantage of the pro-US stance of the Muslim League and PPP to dominate antiwar mobilizations in Peshawar and Karachi. Islamists in Kenya and Nigeria did the same, though with more effect: the American embassies in both countries had to be evacuated. In Indonesia, over 200,000 people of every political hue marched through Jakarta.

Less than a century ago, over eight million votes had been cast for the European Social Democratic parties of the Second International, inspiring the only previous attempt at coordinated action to prevent a war. In November 1912 an emergency conference of the International was convened beneath the Gothic arches of the old Cathedral in Basle, in an effort to avert the looming catastrophe of the First World War. As the delegates entered they were treated to a rendering of Bach’s Mass in B Minor, which marked the high point of the gathering. The Socialist leaders, German, British, French, pledged to resist each and every aggressive policy of their respective governments. It was agreed that, when the time came, their parliamentary deputies would vote against war credits. Keir Hardie’s call for an ‘international revolutionary strike against the war’ was applauded, though not put to the vote. Jean Jaurès was loudly cheered when he pointed out ‘how much smaller a sacrifice a revolution would involve, when compared to the war they are preparing’. Victor Adler then read the resolution, which was

unanimously approved. It concluded: 'Let the capitalist world of exploitation and mass murder be confronted by the proletarian world of peace and international brotherhood.'

By August 1914 these worthy sentiments had crumbled before the trumpet blast of nationalism. The programmatic clarity displayed at Basle evaporated as the tocsin rallied the citizens of each state for war. No credits were refused; no strike was called or revolution fomented. Amid a growing storm of chauvinist hysteria, Jaurès was assassinated by a pro-war fanatic. While a brave, bedraggled minority gathered unnoticed in the Swiss town of Zimmerwald to call for the imperialist war to be turned 'into a civil war, against reaction at home', the majority of Social Democratic leaders stood stiffly to attention as their supporters donned their respective colours and proceeded to slaughter each other. Over ten million perished on the battlefields of Europe to defend their respective capitalisms, in a conflict that saw a new Great Power make its entrance on the world stage. A century later, the United States of America had seen off virtually every rival to become the lead—often, the solo—actor in every international drama.

The eight million and more who marched this year were not mobilized by any International, nor did they share a common programmatic outlook. From many different political and social backgrounds, they were united only by the desire to prevent the imperialist invasion of an oil-rich Arab country in a region already riven by a colonial war in Palestine. Instinctively, most of those who marched did so because they rejected the official justifications for the bloodshed. It is difficult for those who accept these as 'plausible' to understand the depth of resistance they provoked and the hatred felt by so many young people for their propagators. Outside the United States, few believe that the fiercely secular Ba'ath Party of Iraq has any links with al-Qaeda. As for 'weapons of mass destruction', the only nuclear stockpile in the region is situated in Israel; and, as Condoleezza Rice herself had pointed out in the final year of the Clinton administration, even if Saddam Hussein had such an arsenal, he would be unable to deploy it: 'If they do acquire wmd, their weapons will be unusable because any attempt to use them will bring national obliteration'. Foreign Affairs, Jan–Feb 2000. [FGCOLOR, '#E3E3E3', BGCOLOR, '#000000'\)"](#) [title="" onmouseout=nd\(\); href="#"_edn1" name=_ednref1 \[1\] Unusable in 2000; but three years later Saddam had to be removed by the despatch of a massive Anglo-American expeditionary force and the cluster-bombing of Iraq's cities, before he got them? The pretext not only failed to convince but served rather to fuel a broad-based opposition as millions now saw the greatest threat to peace coming, not from the depleted armouries of decaying dictatorships, but from the rotten heart of the American empire and its satrapies, Israel and Britain. It is awareness of these realities that has begun to radicalize a new generation.](#)

The imperial offensive

The Republican Administration has utilized the national trauma of 9.11 to pursue an audacious imperial agenda, of which the occupation of Iraq promises to be only the first step. The programme it seeks to implement was first publicized in 1997 under the rubric, 'Project for the New American Century'. Its signatories included Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, Jeb Bush, Zalmay Khalilzad, Elliott Abrams and Dan Quayle, as well as such intellectual adornments as Francis Fukuyama, Midge Decter, Lewis Libby and Norman Podhoretz. The American Empire could not afford to be complacent with the end of the Cold War, they argued: 'We seem to have forgotten the essential elements of the Reagan

Administration's success: a military that is strong and ready to meet both present and future challenges; a foreign policy that boldly and purposefully promotes American principles abroad; and national leadership that accepts the United States' global responsibilities.' The language of this coterie, compared with the euphemisms of the Clinton era, is commendably direct: to preserve us hegemony, force will be used wherever and whenever necessary. European hand-wringing leaves it unmoved.

The 2001 assault on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon was thus a gift from heaven for the Administration. The next day, a meeting of the National Security Council discussed whether to attack Iraq or Afghanistan, selecting the latter only after considerable debate. A year later, the aims outlined in the 'Project' were smoothly transferred to the 'National Security Strategy of the United States of America', issued by Bush in September 2002. The expedition to Baghdad was planned as the first flexing of the new stance. The Right Man, David Frum, Bush's former speechwriter, argues that: 'An American-led overthrow of Saddam Hussein—and a replacement of the radical Ba'athist dictatorship with a new government more closely aligned to the United States—would put America more wholly in charge of the region than any power since the Ottomans, or maybe the Romans'.', FGColor, '#E3E3E3', BGColor, '#000000')" title="" onMouseout=nd(); href="#"_edn2" name=_ednref2 [2] Twelve years of unblockade and Anglo-American bombing had failed to destroy the Ba'ath regime or displace its leader. There could be no better demonstration of the shift to a more offensive imperial strategy than to make an example of it now. If no single reason explains the targeting of Iraq, there is little mystery about the range of calculations behind it. Economically, Iraq possesses the second largest reserves of cheap oil in the world; Baghdad's decision in 2000 to invoice its exports in euros rather than dollars risked imitation by Chávez in Venezuela and the Iranian mullahs. Privatization of the Iraqi wells under US control would help to weaken OPEC. Strategically, the existence of an independent Arab regime in Baghdad had always been an irritation to the Israeli military—even when Saddam was an ally of the West, the IDF supplied spare parts to Tehran during the Iran–Iraq war. With the installation of Republican zealots close to Likud in key positions in Washington, the elimination of a traditional adversary became an attractive immediate goal for Jerusalem. Lastly, just as the use of nuclear weapons in Hiroshima and Nagasaki had once been a pointed demonstration of American might to the Soviet Union, so today a blitzkrieg rolling swiftly across Iraq would serve to show the world at large, and perhaps states in the Far East—China, North Korea, even Japan—in particular, that if the chips are down, the United States has, in the last resort, the means to enforce its will.

The official pretext for the war, that it was vital to eliminate Iraq's fearsome weapons of mass destruction, was so flimsy that it had to be jettisoned as an embarrassment when even famously subservient UN inspectors—a corps openly penetrated by the CIA—were unable to find any trace of them, and were reduced to pleading for more time. This will not prevent their 'discovery' after the event, but few any longer attach much importance to this tattered scarecrow. The justification for invading Iraq has now shifted to the pressing need to introduce democracy to the country, dressing up aggression as liberation. Few in the Middle East, friends or foes of the Administration, are deceived. The peoples of the Arab world view Operation Iraqi Freedom as a grisly charade, a cover for an old-fashioned European-style colonial occupation, constructed like its predecessors on the most rickety of foundations—innumerable falsehoods, cupidity and imperial fantasies. The cynicism of current American claims to be bringing democracy to Iraq

can be gauged from Colin Powell's remarks to a press briefing in 1992, when he was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff under Bush senior. This is what he had to say about the project that is ostensibly now under way:

Saddam Hussein is a terrible person, he is a threat to his own people. I think his people would be better off with a different leader, but there is this sort of romantic notion that if Saddam Hussein got hit by a bus tomorrow, some Jeffersonian democrat is waiting in the wings to hold popular elections [laughter]. You're going to get—guess what—probably another Saddam Hussein. It will take a little while for them to paint the pictures all over the walls again—[laughter]—but there should be no illusions about the nature of that country or its society. And the American people and all of the people who second-guess us now would have been outraged if we had gone on to Baghdad and we found ourselves in Baghdad with American soldiers patrolling the streets two years later still looking for Jefferson [laughter]. [3]

This time Powell will be making sure that Jeffersonian democrats are flown in with the air-conditioning and the rest of the supplies. He knows that they may have to be guarded night and day by squads of hired American goons, like the puppet Karzai in Kabul.

Old mastiffs and new satellites

On the one side, a vast popular outcry against the invasion of Iraq. On the other, a US administration coolly and openly resolved on it from the start. Between them, the governments of the rest of the world. How have they reacted? London, as could be expected, acted as a blood-shot adjutant to Washington throughout. Labour imperialism is a long tradition, and Blair had already shown in the Balkan War that he could behave more like a petty mastiff, snarling at the leash, than a mere poodle. Since Britain has been bombing Iraq continuously, wing-tip to wing-tip with America, for as long as New Labour has been in office, only the naive could be surprised at the dispatch of a third of the British army to the country's largest former colony in the Middle East; or the signature paltering of House of Commons 'rebels' of the stamp of Cook or Short, regretting the violence but wishing God speed to its perpetrators.

Berlusconi in Italy and Aznar in Spain—the two most right-wing governments in Europe—were fitting partners for Blair in rallying such lesser EU fry as Portugal and Denmark to the cause, while Simitis offered Greek facilities for US spy planes. The East European states, giving a new meaning to the term 'satellite', which they had previously so long enjoyed, fell as one into line behind Bush. The ex-communist parties in power in Poland, Hungary and Albania distinguished themselves in zeal to show their new fealty—Warsaw sending a contingent to fight in Iraq, Budapest providing the training-camps for Iraqi exiles, even little Tirana volunteering gallant non-combatants for the battlefield.

France and Germany, on the other hand, protested for months that they were utterly opposed to a US attack on Iraq. Schroeder had owed his narrow re-election to a pledge not to support a war on Baghdad, even were it authorized by the UN. Chirac, armed with a veto in the Security Council, was even more voluble with declarations that any unauthorized assault on the Ba'ath regime would never be accepted by France. Together, Paris and Berlin coaxed Moscow into expressing its disagreement too with American plans. Even Beijing emitted a few cautious sounds of demurrals. The Franco-German initiatives aroused tremendous excitement and consternation

among diplomatic commentators. Here, surely, was an unprecedented rift in the Atlantic Alliance. What was to become of European unity, of nato, of the 'international community' itself if such a disastrous split persisted? Could the very concept of the West survive? Such apprehensions were quickly to be allayed. No sooner were Tomahawk missiles lighting up the nocturnal skyline in Baghdad, and the first Iraqi civilians cut down by the Marines, than Chirac rushed to explain that France would assure smooth passage of us bombers across its airspace (as it had not done, under his own Premiership, when Reagan attacked Libya), and wished 'swift success' to American arms in Iraq. Germany's cadaver-green Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer announced that his government too sincerely hoped for the 'rapid collapse' of resistance to the Anglo-American attack. Putin, not to be outdone, explained to his compatriots that 'for economic and political reasons', Russia could only desire a decisive victory of the United States in Iraq. The parties of the Second International themselves could not have behaved more honourably.

Farther afield, the scene was very similar. In Japan, Koizumi was quicker off the mark than his European counterparts in announcing full support for the Anglo-American aggression, and promising largesse from the beleaguered Japanese tax-payer to help fund the occupation. The new President of South Korea, Roh Moo-hyun, elected with high hopes from the country's youth as an independent radical, disgraced himself instantly by offering not only approval of America's war in the Middle East, but troops to fight it, in the infamous tradition of the dictator Park Chung Hee in the Vietnam War. If this is to be the new Seoul, Pyongyang would do well to step up its military preparations against any repetition of the same adventure in the Korean peninsula. In Latin America, the pt regime in Brazil confined itself to mumbling a few mealy-mouthed reservations, while in Chile the Socialist President Ricardo Lagos—spineless even by the standards of sub-equatorial social democracy—frantically cabled his Ambassador to the un, who had irresponsibly let slip the word 'condemn' in chatting with some journalists, to issue an immediate official correction: Chile did not condemn, it merely 'regretted' the Anglo-American invasion.

In the Middle East, the landscape of hypocrisy and collusion is more familiar. But, amidst the overwhelming opposition of Arab public opinion, no client regime failed to do its duty to the paymaster general. In Egypt Mubarak gave free passage to the us Navy through the Canal and airspace to the usaf, while his police were clubbing and arresting hundreds of protesters. The Saudi monarchy invited cruise missiles to arc over their territory, and us command centres to operate as normal from their soil. The Gulf States have long become virtual military annexes of Washington. Jordan, which managed to stay more or less neutral in the first Gulf War, this time eagerly supplied bases for American special forces to maraud across the border. The Iranian mullahs, as oppressive at home as they are stupid abroad, collaborated with cia operations Afghan-style. The Arab League surpassed itself as a collective expression of ignominy, announcing its opposition to the war even as a majority of members were participating in it. This is an organization capable of calling the Kaaba black while spraying it red, white and blue.

The reality of the 'international community'—read: American global hegemony—has never been so clearly displayed as in this dismal panorama. Against such a background of general connivance and betrayal, the few—very few—acts of genuine resistance stand out. The only elected body that actually attempted to stop the war was the Turkish parliament. The newly elected akp regime performed no better than its counterparts elsewhere, cravenly bargaining for

larger bribes to let Turkey be used as a platform for a land attack on Northern Iraq. But mass pressures, reflexes of national pride or pangs of conscience prompted large enough numbers of its own party to revolt and block this transaction, disrupting the Pentagon's plans. The Ankara government hastened to open airspace for us missiles and paratroop drops instead, but the action of the Turkish parliament—defying its own government, not to speak of the United States—altered the course of the war; unlike the costless Euro-gestures that evaporated into thin air when fighting began. In Indonesia, Megawati pointedly drew attention to the Emperor's clothes by calling for an emergency meeting of the Security Council to condemn the Anglo-American expedition. Naturally, after months of huffing and puffing from Paris, Berlin and elsewhere about the sanctity of an authority, the response was complete silence. In Malaysia, Mahathir—not for the first time breaking a diplomatic taboo—bluntly demanded the resignation of Kofi Annan for his role as a dumb-waiter for American aggression. These politicians understood better than others in the Third World that the American Empire was using its huge military arsenal to teach the South a lesson in the North's power to intimidate and control it.

Quisling syndrome

The war on Iraq was planned along the lines set out by its predecessors in Yugoslavia and Afghanistan. It is clear that politicians and generals in Washington and London hoped that the Kosovo–Kabul model could essentially be repeated: massive aerial bombardment bringing the opponent to its knees without the necessity of much serious combat on the ground. New York Times, 2 March 2003.', FGCOLOR, '#E3E3E3', BGCOLOR, '#000000')" title="" onmouseout=nd()); href="#"_edn4" name=_ednref4 [4] In each of these cases there was no real resistance, once b-52s and daisy-cutters had done their work. But on hand to secure the right result were also indispensable 'allies' of the targeted regimes themselves. In the Balkans it was Yeltsin's emissaries who talked Milošević into putting his head into the American noose by withdrawing his troops intact from their bunkers in Kosovo. In Afghanistan, it was Musharraf who ensured that the bulk of Taliban forces and their Pakistani 'advisers' melted away, once Operation Enduring Freedom began. In both countries, it was the external patron whom the local regimes had relied on for protection that pulled the rug from under them.

In Iraq, however, the Ba'ath dictatorship was always a tougher and more resilient structure. It had received varying diplomatic and military support from abroad at different stages of its career (including, of course, from the United States, as well as Russia), but had never been dependent on them. Confident, nevertheless, that its top command must be brittle and venal, Washington persistently tried to suborn Iraqi generals to turn their coats or, failing that, simply to assassinate Saddam himself. Once all such attempts—even at the eleventh hour—proved a fiasco, the Pentagon had no option but to launch a conventional land campaign. The economic and military strength of the American Empire was always such that, short of a rebellion at home or an Arab-wide intifada spreading the war throughout the region, it could be confident of pushing through a military occupation of Iraq. What it could not do was predict with any certainty the political upshot of such a massive act of force.

In the event, the Iraqi Army did not disintegrate at the first shot; there was little sign of widespread popular gratitude for the invasion but rather more of guerrilla resistance and—as civilian casualties from missiles, mortars and bombing raids mounted—of increasing anger in the

Arab world. Temporarily, the Crusader armies succeeded in making Saddam Hussein a nationalist hero, his portraits flourished on demonstrations in Amman and Gaza, Cairo and Sanaa. At the time of writing, the hospitals of Baghdad are overflowing with the wounded and dying, as the city is prised apart by American tanks. 'We own it all', declares a us colonel, surveying the shattered capital in the spirit of any Panzer commander in 1940. *Los Angeles Times*, 7 April 2003. Analogies with Hitler's blitzkrieg of 1940 are drawn without compunction by cheerleaders for the war. See Max Boot in the *Financial Times*, 2 April: 'The French fought hard in 1940—at first. But eventually the speed and ferocity of the German advance led to a total collapse. The same thing will happen in Iraq.' What took place in France after 1940 might give pause to these enthusiasts.', FGFCOLOR, '#E3E3E3', BGFCOLOR, '#000000')" title="" onmouseout=nd(); href="#_edn5" name=_ednref5 [5] Behind the armoured columns, the Pentagon has an occupation regime in waiting, headed by former us General Jay Garner, an arms dealer close to the Zionist lobby at home, with assorted quislings—fraudsters and mountebanks like Ahmed Chalabi and Kanan Makiya—in its baggage train. It will not be beyond the us authorities to confect what it can dub as a representative regime, with elections, an assembly and so on, while the 'transitional administration' will no doubt be funded by the sale of Iraqi assets. But any illusion that this will be a smooth or peaceable affair has already vanished. Heavy repression will be needed to deal, not merely with thousands of Ba'ath militants and loyalists, but with Iraqi patriotic sentiments of any kind; not to speak of the requirements for protecting collaborators from nationalist retribution.

Already the lack of any spontaneous welcome from Shi'ites and the fierce resistance of armed irregulars have prompted the theory that the Iraqis are a 'sick people' who will need protracted treatment before they can be entrusted with their own fate (if ever). Such was the line taken by the Blairite columnist David Aaronovitch in the *Observer*. Likewise, George Mellon in the *Wall Street Journal* warns: 'Iraq Won't Easily Recover From Saddam's Terror': 'after three decades of rule of the Arab equivalent of Murder Inc, Iraq is a very sick society'. To develop an 'orderly society' and re-energize (privatize) the economy will take time, he insists. On the front page of the *Sunday Times*, its reporter Mark Franchetti quoted an American nco: "The Iraqis are a sick people and we are the chemotherapy", said Corporal Ryan Dupre. "I am starting to hate this country. Wait till I get hold of a friggin' Iraqi. No I won't get hold of one. I'll just kill him." The report—in Murdoch's flagship paper—goes on to describe how his unit killed not one but several Iraqi civilians later that day. *Sunday Times*, 30 March 2003.', FGFCOLOR, '#E3E3E3', BGFCOLOR, '#000000')" title="" onmouseout=nd(); href="#_edn6" name=_ednref6 [6] No doubt the 'sick society' theory will acquire greater sophistication, but it is clear the pretexts are to hand for a mixture of Guantanamo and Gaza in these newly Occupied Territories.

United Nations of America

There will, of course, be pleas from the European governments for the un to take over the conquests of American arms, which Blair, keener than Bush on unctuous verbiage, will second for reasons of his own. Much talk will be heard of humanitarian relief, the urgency of alleviating civilian suffering and the need for the international community to 'come together again'. So long as no real power is ceded to it, the us has everything to gain from an *ex post facto* blessing bestowed on its aggression by the un, much as in Kosovo. The months of shadow-boxing in the Security Council—while, in the full knowledge of all parties, Washington readied the laborious

logistics for attacking Iraq—cost it little. Once it had Resolution 1441 in its pocket, passed by a unanimous vote—including France, Russia and China, not to speak of Syria—the rest was décor. Even France’s Ambassador to Washington, Jean-David Levitte, had urged the us not to go forward with the second resolution: ‘Weeks before it was tabled I went to the State Department and the White House to say, “Don’t do it . . . You don’t need it”.’ *Financial Times*, 26 March 2003.¹, FGCOLOR, '#E3E3E3', BGCOLOR, '#000000')" title="" onmouseout=nd(); href="#" _edn7" name=_ednref7 [7]

It was, of course, sanctimony in London rather than bull-headedness in Washington that dragged the world through the farce of further ‘authorization’, without success. But Levitte’s advice spotlights the real nature of the United Nations which, since the end of the Cold War, has been little more than a disposable instrument of American policy. The turning-point in this transformation was the dismissal of Boutros-Ghali as Secretary-General, despite a vote in his favour by every member of the Security Council save the us, for having dared to criticize Western concentration on Bosnia at the expense of far greater tragedies in Africa. Once Kofi Annan—the African Waldheim, rewarded for helping the Clinton Administration to deflect aid and attention from genocide in Rwanda—was installed instead, at Washington’s behest, the organization was safely in American hands.

This does not mean it can be relied on to do the will of the us on every matter, as the failure of its efforts to secure a placebo for Blair made clear. There is no need for that. All that is necessary—and now unfailingly available—is that the un either complies with the desires of the us, or rubber-stamps them after the event. The one thing it cannot do is condemn or obstruct them. The attack on Iraq, like the attack on Yugoslavia before it, is from one point of view a brazen violation of the un Charter. But no member state of the Security Council dreamt of calling an emergency meeting about it, let alone moved a resolution condemning the war. In another sense, it would have been hypocrisy to do so, since the aggression unfolded logically enough from the whole vindictive framework of the un blockade of Iraq since the Gulf War, which had already added further hundreds of thousands dead to the credit of the Security Council since its role in Rwanda, at American instructions. [\[8\]](#) To appeal from the us to the authority of the un is like expecting the butler to sack the master.

To point out these obvious truths is not to ignore the divisions that have arisen within the ‘international community’ over the war in Iraq. When the Clinton Administration decided to launch its attack on Yugoslavia, it could not secure authorization from the Security Council because Russia had cold feet; so it went ahead anyway through nato, in the correct belief that Moscow would jump on board later, and the un ratify the war once it was over. This time nato itself was split, so could not be used as surrogate. But it would be unwise to assume the outcome will be very different.

This is the first occasion since the end of the Cold War when a disagreement between the inner core of the eu and the United States exploded into a public rift, was seen on television and helped polarize public opinion on both sides of the Atlantic. But only a short journalistic memory could forget that a still more dramatic dispute broke out during the Cold War itself, occasioned by the same kind of adventure in the same region. In 1956 a ‘unilateralist’ Anglo-French expedition, in collusion with Israel, attempted to effect regime change in Egypt—to the

fury of the United States, which had not been consulted beforehand and feared the adventure might open the door to Communist influence in the Middle East. When the ussr threatened to use rockets to help Nasser, Eisenhower ordered Britain to pull out of Egypt on pain of severe economic punishment, and the Tripartite assault had to be abandoned. This time the roles have been largely reversed, with France and Germany expostulating at an American expedition, in which Britain—the perpetual attack-dog—has joined.

The difference, of course, is that now there is no Soviet Union to be considered in the calculus of aggression, and overwhelming power anyway rests with America, not Europe. But the lessons of 1956 have not lost their relevance. Sharp international disputes are perfectly compatible with basic unity of interests among the leading capitalist powers, which quickly reassert themselves. The failure of the Suez expedition prompted France to sign the Treaty of Rome establishing the eec, conceived in part as a counterweight to the us. But the us itself supported the creation of the European Community, whose enlargement today serves its purposes, as the French elite is becoming uneasily aware—although far too late to do much about it. Ill-feeling is likely to linger between Washington and Paris or Berlin after the public friction of recent months, even if, as we are repeatedly assured, all sides will strive to put it behind them. Within the eu itself, Britain's role in backing the us against Germany and France, while pretending to play the go-between, has exposed it once again as the Trojan mule in the Community. But the days when De Gaulle could genuinely thwart America are long gone. Chirac and Blair will kiss and make up soon enough.

What is to be done?

If it is futile to look to the United Nations or Euroland, let alone Russia or China, for any serious obstacle to American designs in the Middle East, where should resistance start? First of all, naturally, in the region itself. There, it is to be hoped that the invaders of Iraq will eventually be harried out of the country by a growing national reaction to the occupation regime they install, and that their collaborators may meet the fate of Nuri Said before them. Sooner or later, the ring of corrupt and brutal tyrannies around Iraq will be broken. If there is one area where the cliché that classical revolutions are a thing of the past is likely to be proved wrong, it is the Arab world. The day the Mubarak, Hashemite, Assad, Saudi and other dynasties are swept away by popular wrath, American—and Israeli—arrogance in the region will be over.

In the imperial homeland itself, meanwhile, opposition to the ruling system should take heart from the example of America's own past. In the closing years of the 19th century, Mark Twain, shocked by chauvinist reactions to the Boxer Rebellion in China and the us seizure of the Philippines, sounded the alarm. Imperialism, he declared, had to be opposed. In 1899 a mammoth assembly in Chicago established the American Anti-Imperialist League. Within two years its membership had grown to over half a million and included William James, W. E. B. DuBois, William Dean Howells and John Dewey. Today, when the United States is the only imperial power, the need is for a global Anti-Imperialist League. But it is the us component of such a front that would be crucial. The most effective resistance of all starts at home. The history of the rise and fall of Empires teaches us that it is when their own citizens finally lose faith in the virtue of infinite war and permanent occupations that the system enters into retreat.

The World Social Forum has, till now, concentrated on the power of multi-national corporations and neoliberal institutions. But these have always rested on foundations of imperial force. Quite

consistently, Friedrich von Hayek, the inspirer of the ‘Washington Consensus’, was a firm believer in wars to buttress the new system, advocating the bombing of Iran in 1979 and of Argentina in 1982. The World Social Forum should take up that challenge. Why should it not campaign for the shutting down of all American military bases and facilities abroad—that is, in the hundred plus countries where the us now stations troops, aircraft or supplies? What possible justification does this vast octopoid expanse have, other than the exercise of American power? The economic concerns of the Forum are in no contradiction with such an extension of its agenda. Economics, after all, is only a concentrated form of politics, and war a continuation of both by other means.

For the moment, we are surrounded with politicians and pundits, prelates and intellectuals, parading their consciences in print or the air-waves to explain how strongly they were opposed to the war, but now that it has been launched believe that the best way to demonstrate their love for humanity is to call for a speedy victory by the United States, so that the Iraqis might be spared unnecessary suffering. Typically, such figures had no objection to the criminal sanctions regime, and its accompanying dose of weekly Anglo-American bombing raids, that heaped miseries on the Iraqi population for the preceding twelve years. The only merit of this sickening chorus is to make clear, by contrast, what real opposition to the conquest of Iraq involves.

The immediate tasks that face an anti-imperialist movement are support for Iraqi resistance to the Anglo-American occupation, and opposition to any and every scheme to get the un into Iraq as retrospective cover for the invasion and after-sales service for Washington and London. Let the aggressors pay the costs of their own imperial ambitions. All attempts to dress up the re-colonization of Iraq as a new League of Nations Mandate, in the style of the 1920s, should be stripped away. Blair will be the leading mover in these, but he will have no shortage of European extras behind him. Underlying this obscene campaign, the beginnings of which are already visible on Murdoch’s tv channels, the bbc and cnn, is the urgent desire to reunite the West. The vast bulk of official opinion in Europe, and a substantial chunk in the us, is desperate to begin the post-war ‘healing process’. The only possible reply to what lies ahead is the motto heard in the streets of San Francisco this spring: ‘Neither their war nor their peace’.

8 April 2003

[1] ‘Promoting the National Interest’, [Foreign Affairs](#), Jan–Feb 2000.

[2] In *The Right Man*, David Frum, Bush’s former speechwriter, argues that: ‘An American-led overthrow of Saddam Hussein—and a replacement of the radical Ba’athist dictatorship with a new government more closely aligned to the United States—would put America more wholly in charge of the region than any power since the Ottomans, or maybe the Romans’.

[3] Quoted by Robert Blecher, “‘Free People Will Set the Course of History’: Intellectuals, Democracy and American Empire”, Middle East Report Online, March 2003; www.merip.org

[4] When Kanan Makiya was granted an audience in the Oval Office last January he flattered Bush by promising ‘that invading American troops would be greeted with “sweets and flowers”’. The reality turned out to be slightly different. See [New York Times](#), 2 March 2003.

[5] Banner in the [Los Angeles Times](#), 7 April 2003. Analogies with Hitler's blitzkrieg of 1940 are drawn without compunction by cheerleaders for the war. See Max Boot in the [Financial Times](#), 2 April: 'The French fought hard in 1940—at first. But eventually the speed and ferocity of the German advance led to a total collapse. The same thing will happen in Iraq.' What took place in France after 1940 might give pause to these enthusiasts.

[6] [Sunday Times](#), 30 March 2003.

[7] *Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.*, 26 March 2003.

[8] For this background to the war, see '[Throttling Iraq](#)', editorial, NLR 5, September–October 2000.