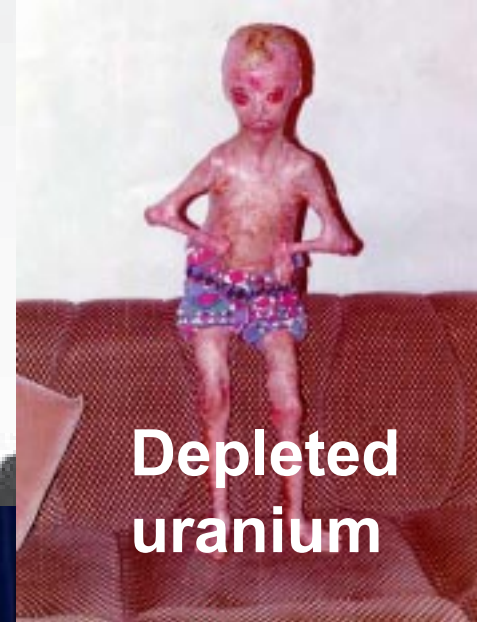


Liberation

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Spring 2002

anti-imperialist bulletin of the anti-capitalist alliance

Oppose
the
West's
wars on
Iraq



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Liberating ideas & the movement we need to oppose the war on Iraq

With this first issue of *Liberation* readers will find articles that challenge the status quo and viewpoints that they will not find in the mainstream media. This journal of the Anti-Capitalist Alliance aims to be thought-provoking and to challenge the myth put out by the corporates that this is the best of all possible worlds. We live in a world which cries out for change, where the extreme poverty of masses of people stands in sharp contrast to the extreme wealth of a few. The rich/poor divide is both between countries and within them. *Liberation* carries a range of perspectives – united by a common thread of anti-imperialism.

Talking about imperialism

Imperialism is a term that is hardly heard in New Zealand, yet we live in an imperialist country. New Zealand is one of the exploiter countries of the world, allied to the United States and part of the Western political-military grouping which robs and oppresses the Third World. That is why New Zealand has participated in nearly all the US-led wars since World War 2 and why Colin Powell could say that the two countries were very, very, very good friends. This relationship is very profitable for the elites but it does little to benefit the working class.

For the best part of this year Bush and his clique have kept up a barrage of threats against Iraq. Bush keeps promising a new war to topple the regime there, yet the old war has never stopped. Since the sanctions were imposed in August 1990 hundreds of thousands of civilians have died through being denied the necessities of life.

Bush has been trying to make a case for war with claims that Iraq is building a huge arsenal of 'weapons of mass destruction'. All the hype is just a smokescreen. For a start, why should such weapons be the preserve of the big powers and their partners? As everybody knows there is no power that can match the United States when it comes to quantities of weapons of



London anti-war protest

horror. Of course, as any sober person can see, Iraq is unlikely to have much in the way of these weapons and this is recognised by former weapons inspector Scott Ritter. He is in a position to know after spending years in Iraq looking for chemical, biological and nuclear weapons and witnessing first-hand the devastation caused by the sanctions. He has stated plainly that the Bush administration has not produced hard facts "that substantiate any allegations that Iraq is today in possession of weapons of mass destruction or has links to terror groups responsible for September 11 attacks on the United States" (*New Zealand Herald*, 9 September 2002).

US is the real threat

It is not Iraq that poses the threat to the world - it is the United States. It already has a stranglehold over Iraq and that domination has been enforced over the past decade with not only the sanctions but also frequent bombing raids carried out by US and British planes in areas declared 'no-fly' zones.

Countless civilians have been killed in these raids.

A new war will bring even more suffering to the Iraqi people. Confidential leaked reports say that such a war would start with B-2 stealth bombers raining 1000kg bombs followed by an invasion of tens of thousands of US Marines. (That these reports keep being leaked shows there is opposition within the establishment among those who see that such a war would inflame anti-US sentiment in the Middle East and may not greatly strengthen the US position.)

"War on Terror"

The war drive is part of the so-called 'war on terror'. In reality it is plain state terrorism being used against the world's people. Furthermore, we in this country are not exempt from the 'war on terror'; the government has just passed the Terrorism Suppression Act. This legislation does a lot to undermine civil liberties and greatly increases the

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Depleted uranium - another weapon of Western terror

The following was compiled by Australian antiwar activist **David Spratt**

As Australian prime minister John Howard salivates at the prospect of sending Australian forces to an imperial war against Iraq, will he tell the Australian people how many soldiers, like their American and British counterparts from the last war against Iraq in 1991, will slowly become disabled or die from the toxic effects of the depleted uranium warheads and chemical residues that will rain down on the field of battle?

183,000 veterans, or more than one-quarter of US military personnel, from the 1991 Gulf War war against Iraq were classified as "disabled" by mid-1991; a rate two and one half times the disability rate from the 10-year-long Vietnam War and more than five times the rate of Korean war veterans.



Above, US Gulf War veteran ill from DU; right, Iraqi child affected by DU.



Injuries

Their disabilities have been many, from knee injuries to post-traumatic stress disorder and a combination of conditions characterised by muscle aches and joint pain, chronic fatigue, headaches, anxiety, depression, dizziness, sleep disorders, rashes, loss of concentration, kidney damage, birth defects, and wastage and death from cancers and immune deficiency disorders known collectively as Gulf War Syndrome (GWS). A two-year study headed by US Senator Don Riegle found that 77 percent of the wives of GWS veterans were also ill, as well as 25 percent of the children conceived before the war. A 1996 survey of US Gulf War veterans in the small Mississippi town of McGann showed that out of 267 families questioned, 67 per cent of children conceived after their fathers had returned from the Gulf had rare birth deformities.

Whilst the US Department of Defence continues to deny any organic basis to Gulf War Syndrome, and there has been evidence of links to chemical and biological weapon residues, increasingly the finger is pointing to depleted uranium (DU), used to harden bombs used by the West to decimate

Iraqi ground forces. DU, which remains radioactive for 4.5 billion years, was incorporated into tank armor, missile and aircraft counterweights and navigational devices, and in tank, anti-aircraft and anti-personnel artillery.

Depleted uranium does not occur naturally. It is the by-product of the industrial processing of waste from nuclear reactors and is better known as weapons-grade uranium. Tungsten and DU are the main options for hardened warheads known euphemistically as "advanced unitary penetrators", including those deployed in Iraq in 1991. More recently, in Afghanistan, these have included 2 tonne GBU-37 Bunker Busters and 2000 lb GBU-24 Pave-way smart bombs, and the Boeing AGM-86D, Maverick AGM-65G and AGM-145C hard target capability cruise missiles. Both Tungsten and DU are used by US and UK forces for armour-piercing shells, but DU is preferred because it burns inside the target to become an incendiary bomb and is far cheaper and easier to manufacture.

Radioactive waste

"Depleted uranium is a radioactive waste and, as such, should be

deposited in a licensed repository," according to a June 1995 statement by the US Army Environmental Policy Institute. At no point does it advise its use on mosques, schools, hospitals, Belgrade radio stations or a Chinese embassy. "Basically, DU missiles are just cylinders of nuclear waste with fins," says Angus Parker, a sick veteran and former expert technician at Britain's Porton Down weapons establishment, who was deployed in the Gulf with the First Field Laboratory Unit.

Whilst the Pentagon says studies of the veterans group with the highest DU exposure show their levels are "still well below occupational exposure limits", one of their own experts tells a very different story.

In September 2000 Dr Asaf Durakovic, professor of nuclear medicine at Georgetown University, Washington, and the former head of nuclear medicine at the US Army's veterans' affairs medical facility in Delaware, told a conference of eminent nuclear scientists in Paris that "tens of thousands" of British and American soldiers are dying from radiation from depleted uranium (DU) shells fired during the Gulf war. Durakovic

concluded that troops inhaled the tiny uranium particles after American and British forces fired more than 700,000 DU shells during the conflict. The finding begins to explain for the first time why medical orderlies and mechanics are the principal victims of Gulf war syndrome. His findings have been verified by four independent experts.

Just 10 months after the Gulf War, Iraqi doctors were already bewildered by the rise in rare cancers and birth deformities. At the time, it was not known that DU weapons had been used in the war, but the doctors were already comparing their new cases to those they had seen in textbooks related to nuclear testing in the Pacific in the 1950s. In Basra, the main city of southern Iraq which was in the eye of "desert storm," paediatrician Dr Jenan Hussein has completed a thesis comparing the cancers and birth deformities seen in Iraq with those following the bombing of Hiroshima. Experts say that DU has entered the food chain via the water table and soil.

Professor Doug Rokke, the Pentagon expert who devised the clean-up of nuclear material from Kuwait says that the clean-up was never completed. By 2001 half of his team has died of DU-related illnesses and the other half, including himself, were desperately sick — with the exception of the only team member who insisted on wearing full radiological protective clothing, despite the heat.

Criminal act

Having seen the result of their use, it is not difficult to understand why former US Attorney-General Ramsey Clark considers the use of DU weapons a "criminal act". The Pentagon has confirmed that 320 tonnes of DU dust remain in Iraq. Some scientists estimate that there could be as much as 900 tonnes.

More recently DU-tipped weapons have been used in Afghanistan and in the NATO bombing of the Balkans, to the increasing consternation of European governments, and even their military chiefs. On the day ground troops were sent into the Balkans, the UK Ministry of Defence (MOD) instructed that no service personnel must approach anything which might have been hit by DU and if it were unavoidable they must wear full radiological protective clothing. And what of the returning refugees? And



DU shells

the civilian populations of Iraq and Kuwait in 1991? And the civilian population of Afghanistan in 2001? And the civilian population of Iraq in 2002 or 2003?

US Defence Secretary Rumsfeld has acknowledged the use of DU in Afghanistan, and Defense Department spokesperson Kenneth Bacon confirmed "We obviously put out instructions about avoiding Depleted Uranium dust. Our troops are instructed to wear masks if they're around what they consider to be atomised or particle-sized DU2."

Whilst the British Ministry of Defence (MoD) has always refused to accept any conclusive link between cancer and the use of DU ammunition it has recently decided, after recommendations from the Royal Society, to conduct a study "to identify any links between exposure to depleted uranium and ill health", including a review of the "effects of depleted uranium inhalation on the pulmonary lymph nodes" and the effects of used DU shells on soil and marine environments.

Determined to use DU

But MoD makes it clear that it has no intention of stopping the use of DU munitions whatever the outcome of the research, but instead states that "DU will remain in the UK inventory for the foreseeable future" and indeed that there "is a need to extend the capability of those DU munitions currently available to the UK Armed Forces." And that means the next war against Iraq. But even without the high

likelihood of contamination by DU, Australian troops in the Iraqi war zone will, like those who participated in the 1991 Gulf War, face a toxic chemical soup of insecticides, pesticides and chemical and biological warfare agents released from the bombing of Iraqi facilities; and possibly smoke from burning oil facilities and the effects of experimental preventive medicines.

A congressional investigation headed by then-US Senator Don Riegle held extensive hearings and issued two reports on GWS, pointing to exposure to low levels of chemical and biological warfare agents as contributing to GWS. His committee identified 18 chemical, 12 biological, and four nuclear facilities in Iraq bombed by the U.S.-led allied forces. Debris from the bombings was dispersed into upper atmospheric currents, as shown in US satellite photos, as well as in videotape obtained by Congress. This airborne dispersal came down on the heads of allied personnel in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iraq. Official documents show weather patterns over Iraq that carried chemical fallout to coalition troop positions. So do UN assessments of damage done to well-stocked Iraqi chemical storage facilities. [<http://mediafilter.org/caq/Caq53.gws.html>]

Depleted uranium dust, residue from chemical and biological agents, pesticides and herbicides. This is the destiny of Western troops in the next war against Iraq, and the destiny of the Iraqi people.

How the West strangles the Middle East



Over ten years after the imperialist intervention in the Gulf against Iraq, the Middle East is still a battlefield. The wars being fought in the region - and there are a number of them - are mostly hidden due to a media black-out. But these wars sometimes thrust themselves into the spotlight. Today, it is the case with the war waged by the Israeli state against the Palestinians, who are held hostage in the two tiny homelands "conceded" to them by the 1994 Oslo agreement. Yesterday, it was the case with the war waged by British and US imperialism against the Iraqi population - a war which still goes on in the background ten years after operation "Desert Storm".

The situation in Iraq and in Palestine should leave nobody in any doubt as to the ruthlessness of imperialist policy, and the fact that it will stop at nothing to achieve its ends. Despite official rhetoric about human rights, the suffering of the Iraqi population - or that of the Palestinians - carries little weight among the secretive committees who define imperialism's policy for the Middle East, whether in London, Paris or in Washington.

The hidden war against Iraq, with its death toll of over one million, half of these children under five, as a direct result of the economic sanctions, only proves this. Added to this number should be the casualties from the ongoing bombing by US and British aircraft at so-called "military targets" in the no-fly zones established over the north and south of the country. Even now there are deaths nearly every week as a result of these attacks.

But if this war is still going on today, it is because it had nothing to do with Saddam Hussein's regime itself in the first place, and everything to do with imposing the order of imperialism over the Middle East as a whole, to protect and expand the multinationals' plundering of the region.

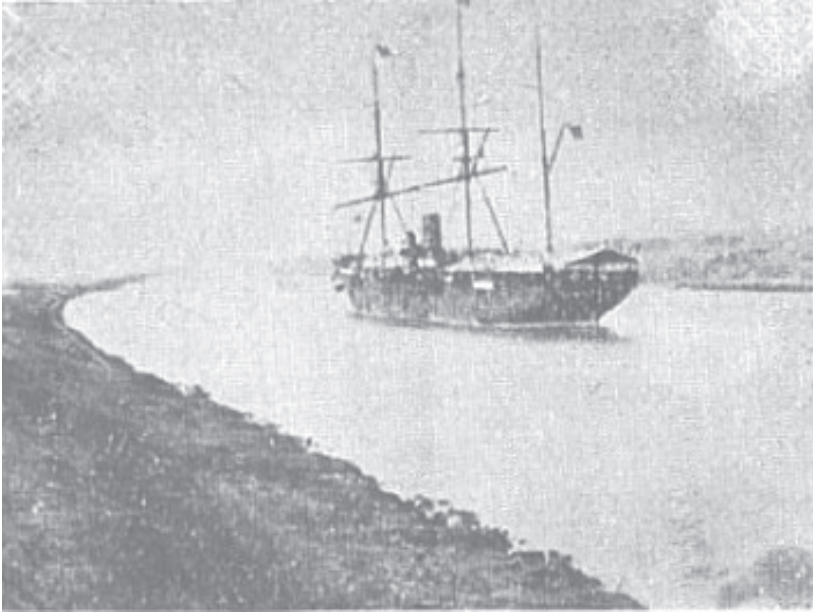
That the problems faced by the imperialist powers in imposing their order go much further than the gestures of defiance of a Saddam Hussein is being graphically illustrated by the rebellious energy displayed once again by the Palestinian youth in Israel. In this case the spark which ignited the explosion came from imperialism's regional stooge, the Israeli establishment itself. But in other cases the spark has been and will without doubt be again, the brutal exploitation imposed on the poor masses by imperialism itself. No matter what effort and resources imperialism puts in to try to secure some form of stability in the Middle East - whether through outright repression or by means of a "peace process" - so as to ensure a steady flow of profits to its multinationals, this stability is always bound to be threatened. Yes, either by the greed of its own regional allies or by the restlessness of the poor masses who are on the receiving end of a double exploitation - by their own dictatorships and by imperialism.

Indeed, the Palestinian issue is only one of the many powderkegs which can blow up in the hands of the imperialist powers at any moment across the Middle East. There may be little attention paid these days to the Kurdish

uprising, but this still continues, with tens of thousands of armed fighters spread across four countries - Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey. Prior to the attacks of September 11 2001, there was little in the media about the numerous fundamentalist currents which have managed to build a significant following due to the despair of the poor population in southern Iraq and across the Arabian peninsula. Then there is the powerful Iranian working class, which after twenty years of living under the yoke of religious reaction may well return at some point to the forefront of the political scene. And between all of these powderkegs, each and every one of the region's dictatorial states is pushing its own cards forward, playing ethnic groups against each other and using their populations as cannon fodder for their territorial ambitions, thereby stoking up even more fuel for the next series of explosions.

It is this situation that the imperialist powers have been trying to contain over the past decades. It is a situation that they have created themselves during more than a century of ruthless plunder of the region's resources and repression against the populations, either directly or by proxy.

The hidden war in the Gulf should be put in a proper context, therefore, that of imperialism's containment policy for the entire region. And it is a policy which is supported and implemented by all the imperialist powers. But it should also be put in the context of the on-going economic war between the capitalist classes of the industrialised



The Suez Canal gave the imperialist powers more control over MidEast oil

countries. On the one hand, the dominant power, the USA, strives to push aside its lesser rivals. And, on the other, these lesser rivals, such as Britain and France, try to cling to what is left of their imperial past. It is this combination of the imperialists' great power games and on-going rivalries which has shaped the Middle East for over a century. But it has reached a point now where imperialist domination means permanent war.

A land for Western looting

By the time the imperialist era began, at the end of the 19th century, and Western capital started to flow out of Europe in search of higher profits, the Middle East was one of its primary targets and the main rivals in the scramble for Middle Eastern resources were French and British capitalists. In fact, long before World War I, both managed to establish a military presence in the region.

Thus, in 1860, 3,000 French soldiers landed in Beirut in order to protect a local minority, the Maronite Christian landlords. The Druze chiefs who had threatened to seize Maronite lands were repelled. Mount Lebanon, the Maronite territory located in the northern part of today's Lebanon, became an autonomous state under the protection of European powers with French troops given the responsibility of enforcing this autonomy. Needless to say, French capitalists used this opportunity to turn the country into a

milch cow for their industries. Mount Lebanon became the main supplier of raw material to the affluent silk and cotton industry in Lyons.

In 1869, the 100-mile long Suez Canal, linking the Mediterranean to the Red Sea was opened. Initially it had been a mostly French operation. But within six years, British financial institutions had managed to win a majority holding in the company set up to run the Canal. And almost immediately, British troops moved into Egypt, to protect British capital's assets. Although British governments always insisted that Egypt was not a colony, British military presence was to last almost a century.

But control of the Red Sea was not enough for British capital. The Persian Gulf was another possible road for trade between Europe and Asia. So in 1899 a treaty was signed with a local feudal family, the al-Sabahs, whose territory was located in the Northern shores of the Gulf. This treaty pledged the protection of the Navy against the Ottoman Empire in exchange for granting British companies exclusive use of the territory. Thus Kuwait was born, with no other historical or geographical justification than its strategic position.

However the main focus of imperialism in the last decades of the 19th century was banking. The entire banking system of the Ottoman Empire was in Western hands, to the extent that at one point, a French consortium

was issuing the Empire's currency and by 1914, French banks owned 60 per cent of the Empire's debt to Europe.

In today's Iran, however, or Persia as it was called at the time, British bankers were superseded by their Russian rivals, who not only ran the monarchy's finances but also its Customs Service. The London City won the upper hand in Persia only after the October revolution in Russia when Persian banking fell into the hands of the Imperial Bank of Persia, an ad hoc outfit set up in 1899 by a British adventurer called De Reuter (the same one who was to launch the press agency Reuters later on).

But already oil was becoming a main stake in inter-imperialist rivalries in the Middle East. As early as the 1870s, the first wells started producing oil in Iraq and geologists already knew that there were considerable oil reserves in the region. But as long as oil was used mainly to produce kerosene, no-one had any idea of the profits that could be made out of it. However, by the turn of the century, high-ranking figures in the British Navy became convinced that to retain its dominant position in the world, the Navy would have to switch its ships from coal to petrol and some capitalists saw this as an opportunity. In 1901, under pressure from the British government, the Persian monarchy granted exclusive oil prospecting and production rights covering 628,000 square miles to William Knox d'Arcy, a speculator who had built a fortune on Australian gold. Seven years later the first well came into operation and in 1909 the Anglo-Persian Oil Company was founded in London and the predecessor of BP was born.

Within the next few years, British governments consolidated their grip over the region's oil resources through a series of treaties imposed on the local feudal lords of today's Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and Oman, which guaranteed London's exclusive rights to any oil found on their territories. This left Britain's rivals, both French and German, with only a limited stake in Middle Eastern oil, confined to today's Iraq.

Sharing out the spoils of the Ottoman Empire

Even before World War I broke out, it was clear that the Ottoman Empire was on the verge of collapse. The British and French governments embarked on

convoluted intrigues in order to secure the largest part of what they expected to be a very profitable cake.

French policy was to build on the large network of Christian communities and monasteries which existed throughout the Middle East. These communities exerted a significant influence in the towns, in particular among the urban petty bourgeoisie. While welcoming the impending fall of the Ottoman Empire, they feared a reactionary backlash from the Arab feudals. So France's policy was to whip up these fears while offering its protection.

Britain, on the other hand, was playing a double game. On the one hand, its 1917 Balfour declaration pledged Britain's support for the setting up of a Jewish "national home" in Arab-populated Palestine. On the other hand, it was whipping up Arab nationalism and promising a Hashemite feudal lord called Hussain, who came from the Arabian peninsula, an empire spreading from the Mediterranean to the Arabian sea in return for backing British interests

against the Turks and, if need be, the French. In fact, although contradictory in appearance, these policies were complementary. The main result of the Balfour declaration was to concentrate the hostility of Arab nationalists on Zionism, thereby letting imperialism in general and British imperialism in particular, off the hook.

This being said, the most decisive intrigue was taking place at a diplomatic level between the French and British governments, with the Russian czar invited to join in the last stage. These discussions, which were completed in 1916, remained secret - that is, until the full text of the agreement was published by the Russian Bolsheviks after the October revolution. This Sykes-Picot agreement, as it came to be known, outlined a repartition of the entire Middle-East between these imperialist partners. It left no space, of course, for the Arab empire promised by the British to Hussain, nor to the Jewish "national home" promised by Balfour. It was a cynical agreement between rich powers aimed at sharing the entire

region between their respective colonial empires.

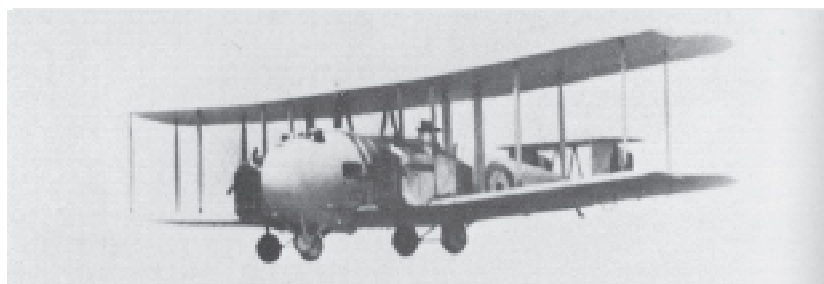
And of course, what prevailed was the Sykes-Picot agreement. At the 1920 San Remo conference, the future of the Middle East was discussed extensively between the imperialist powers. Significantly one of the issues which caused a lot of aggravation during the conference without being resolved was the future of Iraqi oil. Obviously the future of oil profits was more important to the participants than the future of the Middle Eastern populations!

In any case, what came out of this conference was a repartition of the region in which France got today's Syria and Lebanon while Britain got a territory covering today's Iraq, Jordan, Israel and Egypt. Of course, all this was taking place under the suspicious eye of the USA, which had just emerged during the war as the world's leading imperialist power. And, while being much too overstretched to be able to play an active military role in the Middle East, the American leaders were determined to keep the expansion of their European rivals' spheres of influence within certain limits. So, for instance, they insisted that the old terminology of the colonial days should be dropped. Instead of saying that such and such area was to become a French or British colony, it was stated that France or Britain were given an "international mandate" over that area. Of course, this did not make much difference for the populations concerned. But already the idea of an imperialist "world order", guaranteed by all imperialist powers, was there, even though, behind the scenes, bitter rivalries were at work between the proponents of this "world order". In that, as well, little has changed since 1920.

To all intents and purposes, however, the areas which came under French and British mandate as a result of the San Remo conference, became French and British colonies. The populations felt it soon enough when they tried to raise demands related to the promises made to them during the war.

Imperialism and the rise of Arab nationalism

The impending collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the temporary weakening of imperialist powers in the region during



Vickers Vernon bombers like this one were used in the 1920s by the RAF's "Bomber" Harris to drop incendiary bombs on Iraqi villages

Arthur "Bomber" Harris pioneered the bombing of civilian targets during his time in "Mesopotamia" - Iraq, a technique he later perfected in the mass fire bombings of German civilians during World War Two. Even in his own words, a sense of the devastation he wreaked is readily apparent:

Most of the bombing was done with baby incendiaries. We didn't want to hurt people if we could avoid it - except the Turks who were invaders. No, after the Turkish war it was a matter of keeping the tribes in order by air control, and we found that by burning down their reed-hutted villages, after we'd warned them to get out, we put them at the maximum inconvenience without physical hurt. . .

Elsewhere, he noted that in a mere "forty-five minutes a full-size village can be practically wiped out and a third of its inhabitants killed or injured."

Often the villagers' only "crime" was a refusal to pay taxes. Gas shelling by artillery was another method of terrorising the civilian population. It was only technical difficulty that prevented its being dropped from the air. The introduction of gas can be directly attributed to its enthusiastic promotion by Winston Churchill, then Minister of State for the Crown and Colonies and Harris' boss.

Ironically, most of the bombings were of Kurdish villages in northern Iraq. The Gulf War is not the first time that the Iraqi Kurds have been betrayed by Western imperialism.

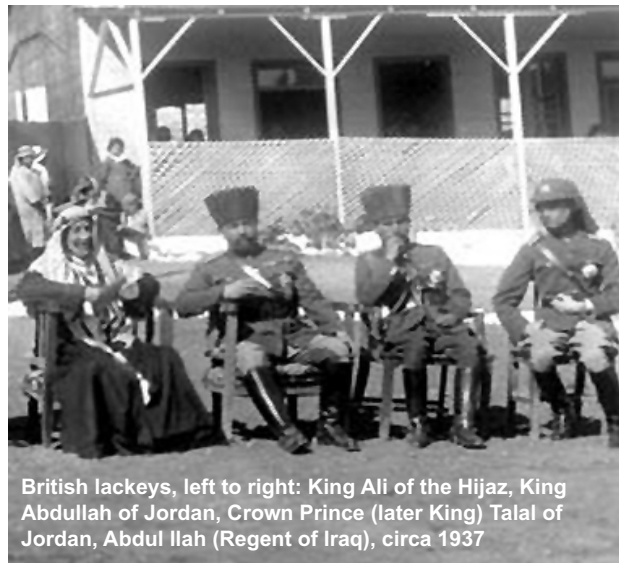
the war and the promises they had made, had combined to generate great expectations among Arab nationalists, but above all among the Arab masses. Since the end of the war, unrest had been brewing and demonstrations against foreign rule had taken place in Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq and Syria.

However, the first explosion came in Egypt, following Britain's refusal to allow a delegation to bring a petition in favour of Egyptian independence to the Versailles Peace Conference. By the Spring of 1919, a massive wave of strikes and riots occurred in the main cities, with the emergence of militant unions. This wave was to last well into the 1920s.

The publication of the San Remo agreement only poured oil on the flames, setting alight a large part of the Middle East. In June 1920, a general rebellion broke out across today's central Iraq against British domination and for the setting up of an independent state. Despite the brutal repression by British troops, the rebellion lasted for five months, resulting in significant casualties among British forces. This led London to seek some form of indirect rule for Iraq. The problem was to find an Arab leader who would be loyal to British interests. A solution to this difficult problem was eventually found. Faisal, a son of Britain's old ally Hussain, had just been chased out of Syria where he had attempted to proclaim himself king of a new Greater Syria. Faisal was looking for a job and the British authorities were only too happy to create a new position for him - that of king of Iraq - regardless of the

fact that Faisal had no connection whatsoever with Iraq. At the same time, another of Hussain's sons was appointed king of the new state of Transjordan (today's Jordan), carved out of Palestine to serve as a buffer on the Arabian border.

For the British government all this was merely a game of chess. Pawns were moved here, knights produced there, and kingdoms could be done or undone according to needs. Just like borders, in fact. Following remonstrations by the Arabian ruler, Ibn Saud, who was increasingly worried about a possible reduction of his territory due to the ill-defined borders of Iraq, the British High-Commissioner in Baghdad convened a meeting in 1922, where these borders were drawn. And it only takes a look at a map to figure out how this was done - by drawing a few straight lines with a ruler. Thus Iraq came into existence in its modern form, as an artificial construction which took no account of ethnic or even geographic considerations. It was crippled from the start as it had no



British lackeys, left to right: King Ali of the Hijaz, King Abdullah of Jordan, Crown Prince (later King) Talal of Jordan, Abdul Ilah (Regent of Iraq), circa 1937

proper access to the Persian Gulf. And this simply because the only way around this would have been to integrate Kuwait into Iraq - something that British imperialism would not even consider. And as we know, ever since, the artificial existence of Kuwait has been a bone of contention and a factor of war in the region - all this for the sole benefit of imperialist oil companies.

That same year, an Anglo-Iraqi treaty set the framework of the relationship between the two countries. Britain would guarantee Iraq's territorial integrity, in return for RAF bombers and British troops being stationed permanently in the country. In fact these military forces were to be used often by the ruling monarch to crush unrest in the country during the following period. With this treaty also came so-called "British aid". This consisted of public works undertaken by British companies and financed at a high price by indirect taxes extorted from the Iraqi population. In fact these taxes also went to British banks under another pretext - that of repaying the old debt of the Ottoman Empire for which, under the treaty, the Iraqi monarchy had accepted liability. If this was not colonisation, it certainly felt like it for the populations!

Meanwhile, in its portion of the region, French imperialism was implementing a policy which was somewhat different from that of the British, but had similar consequences for the populations. In 1920, 70,000 French troops had been sent to Damascus, under the cover of the



Ottoman Empire: after WW1, it was divided into spheres of influence by the imperialist powers

League of Nations, in order to crush the emerging pan-Arab nationalist movement. The whole area under French mandate was occupied and the new authorities proceeded to slice up their territory into separate units, each with a specific status, in order to uproot any idea of unification for the future.

So an artificial entity called Lebanon was created, bringing together the Maronite-dominated Mount Lebanon and various regions to the south. There was no particular geographic, ethnic or even religious reason to carve out this new state in such a way, except one - it was the largest possible area surrounding Mount Lebanon in which the Christian community would still make up a majority of the population, albeit only 55 per cent. To ensure the continuing domination of the Maronite bourgeoisie over the new state, proportional representation of all religions at every level of the state institutions was enshrined in the constitution imposed in 1926. At the same time, of course, this created deep divisions within the population which weakened its ability to resist French plunder. In fact Lebanon was designed to be the bulwark of French capital in the region. Significantly, one of the first acts of the mandate, in 1920, had been to set up a stock exchange in Beirut. And subsequently Lebanon became known as the "Switzerland of the Middle East" - due to the fact that Beirut was used as the main channel for French banking transactions with the Middle East, and became a major tax haven for French capitalists.

However, in the rest of the territory under French mandate - today's Syria - things did not go quite as smoothly as in Lebanon. Following the same method designed to divide the populations, Syria was sliced into four autonomous regions. As the semi-official daily paper *Le Temps* wrote in an editorial, "our duty is clearly marked out - to divide in order to rule. The division has been carried out, ruling now begins". But ruling proved more difficult than expected. In 1925, a rebellion broke out among a Muslim community, the Druze, before spreading to the whole of Syria with Syrian unity and independence as its objective. Thousands more French troops were brought in, with the backing of the League of Nations, and whole areas of Damascus were bombed into the ground by the French



Shell: Vultures who thirst for blood and oil

air force. It is worth noting in passing, that this took place under the first left-wing government ever to be in power in France. Eventually the rebellion was crushed in a bloodbath after almost two years of intense fighting.

Nine years later, a 50-day general strike forced the colonial authorities to seek a compromise. An agreement was signed with the rebel leaders whereby France would recognise Syria's independence in return for being allowed to keep an infantry garrison and two air bases in the country. However, the French government of the time refused to recognise this agreement and Syria's colonial status remained in force. Again this government was the socialist party-led government of the Popular Front, which had just been brought to power by a wave of radicalisation in France! In fact, of all French governments, those led by reformist parties proved most determined to demonstrate their attachment to the colonial interests of French capital - something which is also a feature of Labour governments in Britain.

The vultures fight it out among themselves

While French and British imperialism were thus repressing the populations in their own spheres of influence, they were also involved in all sorts of intrigues in order to weaken one another. Thus, in the 1925 Druze rebellion in Syria, many of the weapons used by the Druze just "happened" to be of British origin. Just as, during the same period, some of the riots against British rule in Palestine were instigated

by mysterious nationalist groups based in French-controlled Lebanon.

Sometimes, these rivalries took on the form of a three-way game, this time involving a newcomer in the region - the USA. This was so in the case of the control over Iraqi oil. At the San Remo conference, France and Britain had managed to squeeze out American oil companies, with the Anglo-Persian Oil Company taking over Germany's stake. But the US oil majors were unhappy about this. And in 1926, the American leaders used Turkey's territorial claim over the oil-producing Iraqi region of Mosul, to trade the arbitration of the League of Nations in favour of Iraq against a share of the spoils for US companies. The agreement led to the setting up of the Iraqi Petroleum Company, or IPC, whose shares were divided evenly between the British-owned Anglo-Persian Oil Company, the Dutch-owned Shell, a French company and a group formed by the forerunners of Exxon and Mobil.

In 1931, this oil-based coalition was to trigger an uprising in Iraq, when in reply to the Iraqi government's request for an advance on future royalties (this was in the middle of the Great Depression and the price of grain, Iraq's main export had fallen drastically) the IPC demanded that its concession should be extended to the entire Iraqi territory. These extortionate terms, the regime's capitulation and the imposition of heavy additional taxes, resulted in the country's first general strike accompanied by a rural uprising, leading Britain to grant formal independence to Iraq. Although, to all intents and purposes, this changed little to the control effectively exercised by London on the country.

As to the USA, it made other major inroads at the expense of its two main rivals, particularly in the Arabian peninsula. US oil majors had a first lucky strike in Bahrain, in 1932, where the precursors of Chevron and Texaco combined to form the Bahrain Petroleum Company by taking over the concessions previously owned by a small independent operator from New-Zealand. To get around the treaty giving Britain exclusive rights over Bahrain's oil, the new company simply registered in Canada, then part of the Empire.

Then came the USA's master stroke, in Saudi Arabia this time. This



Imperialist troops have continually attacked Mideast countries

country, which had just been united in its present form by Ibn Saud, was still the only area in the region to remain relatively unaffected by imperialist power games. It was also the most backward country in the Middle East, whose feudal rulers lived off the revenue of religion. However it was affected by the world slump, which reduced the flow of pilgrims to Mecca and, by the same token, the revenue they paid to the Saudi monarchy. So Ibn Saud sought another source of income by putting up for sale an oil concession covering 500,000 square miles. Chevron's predecessor narrowly beat the Iraqi Petroleum Company. Shortly afterwards, it formed another venture with Texaco, under the name of the Arabian American Oil Company, or ARAMCO, thereby giving the US oil majors a monopoly over Saudi oil.

Altogether, on the eve of World War II, eight companies controlled all the oil production and prospecting rights in the Middle East - five were American, one British, one French and one Dutch.

US imperialism gains the top position

In the Middle East as everywhere else in the world, World War II was the opportunity for US capital to impose its domination over its weaker rivals.

In the case of the Middle East, this operation began with the elimination of French imperialism. This was made

easy by the fact that France was occupied by Germany, so that only the small part of its army which supported De Gaulle's government in exile was considered as being on the Allies' side. The rest, supporting Petain's pro-German government in France, were treated as enemies. Under the pretext of eliminating the pro-Petain troops in Syria and Lebanon, British troops, together with small units supporting De Gaulle, occupied both countries, immediately promising the end of the French mandate in order to gain the support of the population. In 1943, however, when the newly-elected Lebanese president tried to enact a constitution which made no reference to the French mandate, he was immediately put in jail by the Gaullist military. This sparked off riots in the country and the British used this pretext to force the French troops out of Lebanon. By the end of the war, a last attempt by French authorities to re-establish the French mandate in Syria was halted by a British ultimatum. And in 1947, the combined weight of the US and British governments in the United Nations resulted in French troops being ordered to leave the Middle East once and for all. Britain and the USA remained the only imperialist powers with a military presence in the region.

In the rest of the Middle East, the policy of the two main players was entirely dictated by their determination to protect their oil interests in the

region, their fear of a postwar nationalist explosion and last, but not always least, their rivalry in preparation for the postwar realignment of forces in the Middle East. As a result, the Middle East hosted a disproportionate contingent of Allied troops throughout the war, including in areas which were never directly affected.

Such was the case of Iran, which declared its neutrality at the start of the war. However the sympathies of Reza-Shah's dictatorship for Hitler's Germany were well-known. Both London and Washington suspected that he would increase economic ties with Germany at the expense of Britain and the USA. So, using the pretext of the Iranian government's refusal to expel German "experts" operating in Iran, British and Soviet troops invaded the country in August 1941. British soldiers occupied the Abadan refinery and the country's oil field and forced Reza-Shah to abdicate. But having carried out this task successfully British troops remained in Iran. And in November 1942, they were joined by 30,000 American soldiers, which showed that US imperialism was determined not to let its British rival run the show, even in a British stronghold.

Meanwhile, Washington, fearing that Britain might use the cover of the war to start prospecting for oil in Saudi Arabia, decided that "the defence of Saudi Arabia is vital for the defence of the United States". In 1943, work started on a US military air base located next to the Dhahran oil wells. For the first time the US army no longer had to depend on British air bases in the Middle East.

The Allied powers' concern over oil was illustrated by the fact that several Anglo-American conferences were held in Washington before the end of the war on the issue of the repartition of oil resources between US and British companies. Moreover, the principle of sharing out oil resources between the two main players in the Middle East was confirmed at the February 1945 Yalta conference, which was aimed at preparing the postwar settlement.

But it was in the immediate aftermath of the war that US imperialism took the most decisive step in establishing its domination over the Middle East, thereby pushing British capital onto the sidelines. The years 1945-46 were marked by vast protests against imperialist occupations in

various parts of the Middle East, from Iran to Iraq and Syria. It was against this background of anti-imperialist unrest that the state of Israel was built.

Imperialism's regional Trojan horse

After World War II, the hundreds of thousands of Jews who came out of Nazi concentration camps originated from countries which had been under German occupation. They had no home to go back to, but nor did they particularly want to settle in Palestine despite the call of the Jewish nationalists, or Zionists.

If they ended up going to Palestine it was primarily because the rich imperialist countries barred most of them from entering their territories. Not that entry into Palestine was easy either. The British authorities in Palestine tried to enforce a strict quota system. Illegal immigrants who were caught, were automatically deported to Cyprus and later to Kenya and even Mauritius. Not to mention the shameful episode of the "Exodus-1947" ship which was escorted back to Hamburg with its 4,554 survivors from the Nazi camps. As a result, in fact, most Jewish immigration into Palestine took place not before, but after the setting up of the state of Israel, in May 1948.

In Palestine itself, local Zionist groups had been demanding the setting up of a Jewish state since the 1930s. The years 1936-39 had seen an on-going confrontation in which Zionist terrorist groups had attacked both British soldiers and the Arab population, who were then involved in riots against imperialism. And, of course, Arab nationalist groups had responded in kind. After a respite during the war, Zionist leaders upped the ante, attempting to make political capital out of the plight of the European Jews under Nazi rule. And they sought the support of the imperialist powers for the proclamation of a Jewish state in Palestine. However, the imperialist powers were divided on this issue. Britain, which stood to lose a large part of Palestine, fought against the project tooth and nail. Whereas those who had no interest in protecting Palestine - particularly the USA - supported the setting up of a Jewish state, in order to weaken Britain's grip on the area. Although neither of them dared to articulate this support too openly for fear of upsetting trade relations with



Fresh off the train of modernity: Zionist Commission arriving in Palestine, 1948

Arab rulers.

Once again, in any case, the interests of the populations - Arab or Jewish for that matter - played no part whatsoever in the policies adopted by the imperialist powers. On the contrary, the British authorities, in alliance with Arab landowners, sought to whip up anti-Jewish feelings among the Palestinian poor. Meanwhile, the Zionists - who were armed with French and Czech weapons bought with US funds, thanks to the help of the French and Russian secret services - organised heavily-armed commandos to force Palestinian peasants off their lands and out of their villages. This was a kind of "ethnic cleansing" operation, not unlike that carried out recently by Serb nationalists in Bosnia. And as in Bosnia, the majority of the Arab and Jewish population was caught in the crossfire and left to their own devices to fight for their survival.

The result of all of this was a bloody civil war which lasted three years, in which nationalists on both sides did everything to make it impossible for the two populations to join forces against imperialist domination. For instance, among many other examples, there was the bombing by the Jewish Irgun of the Haifa refinery, one of the few workplaces where Jewish and Arabs were still working side by side, and the murder by Arab nationalists of a Jewish dockers' union leader who advocated the setting up of a Palestinian state in which Arab and Jews would live on equal terms.

Finally, largely due to American

pressure, London decided to withdraw. In May 1948, British troops left Palestine at the same time as a new state of Israel was being proclaimed. However, the British government - then under Labour - had not given up all hopes of regaining some control over Palestine. Just as its last troops were leaving, the troops of the Arab League - that is the British-controlled alliance between Egypt, Jordan and Iraq - entered Palestine. This was British imperialism's last card - a war by proxy - and from this point of view it was a complete failure, since it failed to weaken the new Israeli state. On the contrary, Israel managed to carve out the Negev from Egypt, thereby increasing its initial territory, while Egypt took over the Gaza Strip. On the other hand, it successfully split the ranks of the Arab League by conceding the West Bank to Jordan. The main victims, however, were the Palestinians themselves. In the Gaza strip, for instance, 130,000 Palestinian refugees found themselves cut off from their lands, which they had fled while the battle was raging. They were never allowed back into Israel. In the final settlement, 75 per cent of the former Palestine was taken over by Israel, but with only 15 per cent of its former Arab population.

Today the indelible scars left by Israel's first war are still there - a wall of hatred between the Israeli and Palestinian populations and, above all, the conditions imposed on millions of Palestinians who are still condemned today to live in refugee camps in Israel,

Jordan or Lebanon. In every respect, the setting up of the reactionary religious-based state of Israel was a catastrophe for the population of the entire region. All the more so because it defused the postwar anti-imperialist wave by deflecting it against Jewish settlers, while the Arab leaders were able to divert the discontent against their own rule thanks to the British-sponsored war against Israel. In that sense, right from its inception, the state of Israel emerged as a valuable instrument for imperialism, and it was going to play this role again and again over the following decades.

As to the main victor in all this, it was not even the Zionist movement - even though it had, at last, achieved its aim. It was US imperialism. While Britain had been Palestine's main trading partner in 1947, by 1949 the USA was already dominating Israel's foreign trade. The new state's economy was dependent on US subsidies from the day it came into existence - for weapons, of course, but also for developing the infrastructure it needed. And it became even more dependent when American big business stepped in, taking control of most of the country's financial system, utilities, and trading organisations. While Britain was about to lose its colonies across the Middle East, US imperialism had found something that looked very much like a US colony - in all but name.

The Cold War in the Middle East

Despite the Israel episode, the Arab nationalist movement did bounce back, however. Starting from the early 1950s, a new nationalist wave developed, causing many headaches for imperialist leaders and resulting in several confrontations.

The most significant of these took place in Iran where, under the pressure of anti-British demonstrations, the Shah's government was forced to demand a revision of the terms of the contract between the Iranian government and the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. The latter's reply - a contemptuous "no" - poured oil on the nationalist fire. In March 1951, the Iranian government adopted the



Palestinian child being arrested

principle of nationalising the AOIC. And the following month, it dismissed the pro-British prime minister for dragging his feet on the issue and elected the leader of the *National Front*, Mossadeq. The decision to nationalise the AOIC was then implemented straight away.

This development created havoc in the City of London. In retaliation, the AOIC British headquarters ordered the immediate closure of the Abadan refinery and the oil multinationals agreed to impose a boycott of Iranian oil. British troops were sent to the Iran-Iraq border and the Navy reinforced its presence in the Gulf. Soon Iran's oil sales were reduced to almost nothing, thereby splitting the ranks of the nationalist coalition which backed Mossadeq and making him increasingly dependent on the support of the radicalised urban proletariat.

Despite being portrayed by the British papers at the time as a "communist", Mossadeq was a bourgeois nationalist who found it rather uncomfortable to have to depend on support from the streets. As the US deputy state secretary George McGhee said of him at the time, "his anti-foreign tendencies are more directed against the Russians than

against anyone else". However, when Eisenhower was elected president in January 1952, the US strategists began to look at the situation from a different angle. On the one hand they were worried about the level of social unrest in Iran, at a time when nationalist unrest seemed to be developing in several other Middle-Eastern countries. On the other hand, they saw the situation as an opportunity for US capital to gain what it had failed to achieve during the war - a share of Iran's oil from the British.

So the following year, a military coup engineered by the CIA ousted Mossadeq and installed one of the most repressive regimes ever seen in the region. But western oil interests were now safe. It was decided that the Iranian government would retain ownership of the country's oil, but that it would only sell its oil through an ad hoc consortium

in which the old AIOC, now renamed BP, would have 40 per cent, Shell 14 per cent and the rest would be divided equally between six multinationals, one French and five American. This way the consortium would be in a position to control all Iranian oil and to dictate its terms to the government. At the same time, US imperialism had managed to end Britain's monopoly in Iran. From now on, in fact, Iran was to become a US stronghold, that is until 1979 and the Islamic takeover.

The other main flashpoint which developed in the Middle East was in Egypt, with the overthrow of the pro-British regime in July 1952 by Nasser's "free officers". Nasser represented a layer of the Egyptian bourgeoisie which was tired of living off the crumbs that British companies were prepared to leave them. And, for this reason, he immediately won enthusiastic support in Washington. The US leaders fell over themselves to offer their support and military aid to the new regime. And two years later, under their pressure, Britain agreed to sign an agreement with Nasser whereby British troops were to evacuate Egypt in exchange for the right to use military facilities near the Suez Canal in case of a foreign attack. Washington had stolen another

march on British imperialism.

But the honeymoon turned sour in 1955 when Nasser refused an invitation to join the new Baghdad treaty - which was really an anti-Soviet military alliance sponsored by the USA and Britain and already involving Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Pakistan. The last thing Nasser wanted was to be seen as an imperialist puppet like the Iranian Shah, thereby compromising the possibility of future relationships with the Soviet Union, as well as his credibility in Egypt. The USA retaliated by stopping all arms shipments to Egypt, but Nasser just turned to the USSR for help, and Moscow proved only too willing to oblige. Thereafter it was Nasser's relative independence from imperialism which allowed him to nationalise the Suez Canal.

This presented Western imperialism with a real problem. Nasser was extremely popular across the Middle East, specially among the new generation of army officers, and was bound to be emulated. And in some respects this was exactly what happened in Iraq, in July 1958, with general Qassem's coup, which overthrew the pro-British monarchy. Except that, in some respects, the new regime, which had the support of a wide spectrum of political forces, ranging from the nationalists to the Iraqi Communist Party, proved a lot more radical than Nasser's. This led Washington and London to make a preventive show of strength, by sending troops to Lebanon and Jordan respectively.

However this did not stop the new Iraqi regime from withdrawing immediately from the Baghdad Pact, while inviting Communist Party members into office. Worse even, from the point of view of imperialism at least, after some futile attempts at negotiating a new contract with the Iraqi Oil Company, Qassem nationalised Iraq's oil reserves. All this was taking place on the backdrop of a climate of intense politicisation and radicalisation in the country. It seemed to be a re-run of the Mossadeq episode in Iran, except that this time imperialism did not have people as reliable as the Iranian generals and the Shah waiting on the sidelines to take over. So they chose another option - the Baath (or "resurrection") party, a nationalist current, whose socialist rhetoric and Pan-Arabism was inspired by Nasser.

Probably the fact that it had strong support in the army led the CIA to consider that it would be a "lesser evil". And in February 1963 a Baathist coup overthrew Qassem and launched a wholesale massacre of communist activists and even fellow travellers. But the new regime proved more fragile than US imperialism had hoped. It took another two military coups for it to become more or less stable, from 1968 onwards. And by that time, Saddam Hussein was already the regime's strong man. At last, the CIA had found the man they were looking for!

These are only some examples in a long series of imperialist open or covert interventions in the Middle-East in the 1950s and 1960s. What was common in these interventions, however, was on the one hand the usual concern about protecting oil interests from the region's populations and, on the other, the fear of regimes that might be prepared to seek Soviet aid as a means to extract some concessions from imperialism. Put in a nutshell, this is exactly what the so-called Cold War was about in the Middle East.

The Palestinian Explosion

The powderkeg which had been stoked by the imperialist powers via the post-war settlement in Palestine finally exploded in the 1970s.

By that time Palestinians were scattered all over the Middle East. In Lebanon and Jordan, however, the majority of the Palestinian refugees lived in squalid conditions surrounded by the local armies of their host countries. To all intents and purposes they were imprisoned in these camps and not surprisingly it was these camps that exploded in the 1970s.

This uprising could have been the blueprint for a general revolt across the Middle East - and for what imperialist powers actually feared most - the merger of the Palestinian fight with a rising of the poor masses of the host countries. It put the Palestinian insurgents in a position where they could have placed themselves at the head of a revolution throughout the crisis-ridden Middle Eastern region. And if they had been able to address the other Arab peoples, seeking alliance with them, and not with their reactionary leaders, as the policy of Arafat's PLO required, the whole edifice of dictatorships and reactionary

regimes which is the basis of imperialist domination in the Middle East could have been blown up.

In Jordan where the largest concentration of refugees was to be found as a result of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, the fact that the Palestinians began to arm themselves and organise their own militias proved too much for the discredited regime of King Hussein. He moved in to crush the mobilisation in the refugee camps, terrified that the Jordanian poor who freely mixed with the refugees and had great sympathy for them could be pulled in behind them and threaten his regime. This was the so-called "Black September" massacre in 1970.

Behind Jordan's decision was the hand of imperialism, and particularly British imperialism, since Hussein would never have moved a finger without asking Britain's permission. Imperialism had no wish to risk a popular uprising against their client regimes in the region.

Lebanon

In Lebanon the situation was different. The Lebanese state was already much too weak to deal with the rebellion of its own population. So the presence of several tens of thousands of armed Palestinian refugees, with their own leadership, administration and militias, was able to serve as a catalyst for the discontented population of the Lebanon. From 1972 to 1975, social struggles, strikes and demonstrations against the right-wing Maronite Christian-dominated regime developed in parallel with Palestinian resistance. Peasants driven off their land in the villages of South Lebanon by Israeli bombings joined the Palestinians in their camps. When Israeli commandos killed three PLO leaders in Beirut in 1973, 250,000 Lebanese and Palestinians joined to march in the funeral procession.

The Lebanese far right - known as Phalangists - decided to act against what they saw rightly as a growing threat for the Lebanese bourgeoisie. In April 1975, after months of intensive military training they launched an offensive aimed at establishing a strong state power. Their first target was the Palestinians.

It goes without saying that this offensive was supported tacitly by imperialism and by Israel, both of which supplied the Phalangists with weapons.

However the first few months of civil war saw a number of victories for the "Palestino-Progressive" alliance which advanced on all fronts to gain control of most of the country with the exception of the Christian enclave north of Beirut.

However the prospect of a victory for the Lebanese left threatened the Syrian regime as it might have spread confidence to the Syrian masses and unleashed a popular rebellion in Syria. So after having posed as mediator between the different movements for a year the Syrian leaders decided to intervene against the Palestino-Progressive alliance. They bombarded the Palestinian camps and drove the Progressive alliance into the south of the country and West Beirut.

In doing so, the Syrian regime was not just protecting its own interests, it was demonstrating its ability to play the role of a regional power, capable of maintaining the status quo - which was exactly what imperialism wished - in a situation where Israel could not have intervened without causing a general conflagration across the Arab world. But now that the balance of forces in Lebanon had been made even by Syria's intervention, it became possible for Israel to finish the job. And from 1978 onwards, the Israeli army took over the task of policing Lebanon.

First they occupied south Lebanon, setting up a mercenary police force to control the population. Over the next few years they bombed Beirut intermittently and attacked enclaves of Palestinians. But in 1982 they more or less launched a full-scale war - aimed at driving the PLO out of Lebanon, thereby completing what Syria had begun. At the same time they set out to equip Lebanon with, as prime minister Begin put it, a "strong and independent state", which could be an ally of Israel and preferably its vassal.

The bombing of Beirut and particularly the Palestinian camps in the south west of the city also destroyed much of the city and hit civilians, killing around 30,000 people, while many suffered severe burns from cluster bombs, dropped on market areas where people were congregated. Sabra and Chatila, the two biggest Palestinian camps in Beirut, were left for the Far right militias to take care of and they staged a full-scale massacre of the refugees.

However, due to the friction between



The Nixons with the shah and empress of Iran, early 1970s

the new Phalangist government and the Israelis who had put this government in place, Israel failed to create the vassal state they wanted at their door step. What they did achieve, however, was to get the PLO to discredit itself among the Lebanese masses and even among many Palestinians, by abandoning ship and moving its headquarters to Libya.

Imperialism, which had stood back during the worst of the conflict including the overt slaughter of Palestinian refugees and Lebanese civilians, negotiated the withdrawal of Israel and sent an American, Italian and French force to occupy the West of Beirut. But this operation turned into a political disaster when, in 1983, a suicide bomber blew up the US marine headquarters in West Beirut, killing 241 US servicemen and 58 French paratroopers.

The balance sheet in the Lebanon for both imperialism and its client state, Israel, was not too good. UN forces were unable to keep the peace. New clashes broke out between Druze militias and the Phalangists. And the discredit of the PLO led to the emergence of two new large militias - the pro-Syrian Hamas and the fundamentalist Hezbollah - which are now among the main political forces in the Lebanon, as well as in Israel and Jordan. Once again the only outcome from the imperialist intervention in the Lebanon, even if it was by proxy this time, was at best temporary stability, while creating other powderkegs which would explode, inevitably, in the future.

In this period another explosion was

developing in Iran, where the US's favourite dictator, the notorious Shah from the Pahlavi dynasty held sway.

The Iraq-Iran War

The Shah of Iran was a caricature of a puppet dictator. He lived ostentatiously in the bright lights of the world's parasitic upper crust and fashion media. But at the same time he inflicted a regime of terror and deprivation on the Iranian population. The Islamic clergy were the only layer in Iranian society which was allowed to carry out any propaganda among the population, which it did from the network of mosques around the country.

The length of time that the Shah's regime survived - 26 years - when it was so despised by the population - is testimony to the effectiveness of the military aid it received from imperialism and US imperialism in particular.

However by 1977 the masses could no longer be held back by the repressive apparatus. The majority of the working class, students, the urban population - all these sections were by now organised in one or other political organisation. In 1978 the country became more or less ungovernable. Oil workers had seized control of their production sites and refineries and the urban population was in a state of constant mobilisation. By January 1979 the Shah had packed his bags and fled. The poor classes had overthrown one of the most brutal dictatorships in the Middle East. Unfortunately they were then robbed of their victory due to the "sacred union" of the majority of the opposition behind

the Ayatollah Khomeini - who returned in triumph from exile to fill the power vacuum. The old state apparatus remained, only it was run by a new hierarchy dressed in the robes of Islam.

US imperialism and its Middle Eastern policy was struck a blow with the ousting of the Shah. But the coming to power of a regime which practised a brutal form of anti-communism in this part of the Middle East, adjacent to the USSR, was not unwelcome. However, the new Iranian regime had committed a major sin, first by taking power without the consent of imperialism and second, by resorting to a populist "anti-imperialist" demagoguery in the name of Islam. This needed to be punished.

So, when Saddam Hussein provoked a war with Iran by sending soldiers across the border in September 1980, the attitude of imperialism was already formulated. The war would inflict far more damage to Iran than sanctions would. And the pitting of these two regimes against each other would weaken both of them, reducing the threat of either of them disturbing the political balance imperialism required in the region. The war was initially therefore encouraged and it was only two years after it started that the UN began its calls for a ceasefire. But even then, Western manufacturers carried on selling weapons to both sides.

However, imperialism did not want the war to result in major border readjustments. The oppressed minorities in the region were too much of a potential powderkeg. And once the Iranian regime had got through the early part of the war without being put into question by its own population, demonstrating its ability to control the masses, it became important for imperialism to protect it against an excessively crushing defeat by Saddam Hussein's army. After all the balance between the two regimes had to be maintained.

So an effort was made to enforce the UN's call for a ceasefire on both sides. In 1987, US, British and French warships were ordered to the Gulf. US missiles targeted five Iranian ships and "by mistake" an Iranian Airbus was shot down for good measure, killing all 290 passengers and crew on board.

Once the war was over, US leaders maintained their boycott of Iran and the ban on US companies importing Iranian



Soviet military display: Moscow could always be trusted to avoid challenging imperialism

oil. But behind this, the US was playing a complex game. For instance, now Iran was able to get loans from the IMF and World Bank which it had previously been refused and all kinds of loopholes were left open to allow Western companies to do some business with Iran.

The end of the Cold War and the "new" world order

The process which led to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Eastern bloc coincided with the Iran-Iraq war, in the 1980s. But what did this change as far the policy of imperialism in the Middle East was concerned?

First it must be said that despite Western propaganda, the Soviet Union never represented a military threat to imperialism, neither in the rich countries nor in the Third World. But the Soviet Union provided its help to those political forces, nationalists in particular, who were willing to accept it, in the hope that once in power these forces would maintain friendly relations with the USSR - and this was the West's real grievance against it.

A number of Third World nationalist leaders and regimes were, therefore, able to play a game of balance between imperialism and the Soviet Union. Such balancing acts were irritating for imperialism because they provided the nationalists with a handy bargaining chip. Guerrilla movements, which would have been helpless without Soviet weapons, were able to carry on

fighting. And regimes whose countries were at the receiving end of exploitation by multinationals were able to extract larger crumbs from their profits. But annoying as this may have been, all this was not catastrophic for imperialism.

First, because the Soviet Union could never match the economic capacity of the imperialist powers when it came to bribing Third World regimes and, in the end, these regimes came back, more often than not, to the fold of the imperialist masters. But second, because the Soviet bureaucracy could always be trusted to avoid actions that would have encouraged the poor masses to fight against imperialism on the basis of their own interests. Whenever a situation seemed to be getting to that point, Moscow took its distance by acting "responsibly" through imperialist institutions such as the United Nations. Such was the case, for instance, during the civil war of the 1970s in Lebanon. Then, the Soviet leaders placed themselves on the side of the Western powers which were calling for the disarming of all militias, not on the side of those, admittedly very few, who were arguing that this was the time for the Middle Eastern masses to shake off the yoke of imperialism.

In other cases, the Soviet bureaucracy's convoluted foreign policy led them to go along with the imperialists' power games. This was the case with the setting up of the Israeli state in 1948. Hoping, no doubt,

that the new state would be grateful for his support, Stalin chose to give Israel his backing. Stalin's choice was entirely dictated by a short-term calculation - namely an Israeli state would reduce Britain's imperialist domination of the Middle East. But apparently he overlooked the possibility that Israel might prop up the influence of US imperialism in the region. In any case, this policy backfired on the Soviet Union in that it alienated the Arab masses and regimes.

Besides, it must be recalled that the Middle Eastern communist parties often paid a high price for the balancing acts of local regimes. If the Baath parties did admit communist party members as ministers in Syria and Iraq, at the same time they carried out a systematic repression against communist activists who dared criticise their regimes. And in Egypt, Nasser - who had just secured military aid from the USSR - jailed thousands of CP members who carried on supporting his regime from inside. No wonder the Egyptian communist party was discredited for a whole generation.

By the end of the 1980s, in any case, the willingness and ability of the Russian bureaucracy to carry on playing the same role with regard to the Third World was significantly reduced - due to the economic crisis in what remained of the USSR and due to its increasing determination to be included as a partner in the imperialists' power games.

This led the leaders of imperialism to review their worldwide policies. There was no longer any risk of US troops being physically confronted with Soviet forces or advisers, while intervening in a Third World country - a situation which would have raised the spectre of a third world war but could also have been expected to generate a current hostile to any form of military intervention among US public opinion. In other words, the US military could now seriously consider the option of direct military intervention across the world as "viable", when it came to defending the interests of imperialism against the populations.

This also opened a whole range of new possibilities for US imperialism since direct US intervention meant that the US would be in a better position to push out its minor French and British rivals in the scramble for Third World bounty - or at least to assert its role as



US personnel flee Saigon, 1975, as liberation forces take over; since getting a good hiding in Vietnam, Washington has suffered a 'Vietnam Syndrome' and been reluctant to risk large-scale US casualties

the main player and the one which gets to share out the loot. And given the on-going crisis of world capitalism, this was not something to be sniffed at.

In January 1988, this new policy was formulated by the Presidential Commission on Long-term Integrated Strategy in a document entitled *Discriminate Deterrence*. The US military structure was to be transformed from a nuclear-strategic one aimed at the Soviet Union to one geared for intervention in the Third World.

So for example, in July 1990, the US staged a joint military drill with the Saudi Arabian armed forces. Initially this drill had been planned to simulate resistance to an attempted invasion of Saudi Arabia by the USSR. By the time the drill took place, US policy had changed. And Norman Schwartzkopf, who was in charge, turned it into an exercise to repel a hypothetical invasion by Iraqi troops - something which can only make one wonder about the "surprise" military response of the US leaders against Iraq the following year.

At the same time, arms sales in the Middle East were stepped up, both for the benefit of multinationals' profits and for the sake of US strategy - the local dictators loyal to imperialism had to be well equipped for a possible crisis. In February 1991, the Pentagon informed the Senate that the sales of US arms would reach a historic record, of \$33bn, half of which were destined for the Middle East.

By the time of the announcement of a "New World Order" after the final collapse of the USSR in August 1990, US president Bush announced that now there would be "peace and respect for borders", as Bush happily described his "new order". All countries would have to keep in line, or rather behind the lines drawn by imperialism and of course, these lines would be policed by the United States, under the cover of the UN if it was available, without it if not. As it happened Saddam Hussein chose just this moment to invade Kuwait, thereby flaunting US authority.

Implementing this new policy was not all that simple, however. Getting US public opinion to agree to it, in particular, was a problem. First the so-called "Vietnam syndrome" had to be cured. In other words the US population had to be convinced that such interventions would not lead to a repetition of history - the drafting of a generation of young men, the continuous flow of injured soldiers coming back from Vietnam, the body bags and the trauma of what had seemed to be an endless war.

This was why the US leaders were so careful in the build up to the Gulf War to reassure public opinion at every stage and then, once the war broke out, to minimise the risks of Western casualties while stressing the so-called "surgical" strikes and "clean" nature of the war. Which of course was nothing but a cynical joke as far as the Iraqi population was concerned.

By 1993, the official policy of the US military had been taken one step further towards direct military intervention. As announced by Les Aspin, president of the Congress Armed Forces Commission, its aim was now to have the capability of intervening simultaneously in two regional conflicts in any part of the world. New defence spending was to be \$260bn/yr over five years. So much for the post-Cold War "peace dividend"! The arms companies were certainly not going to lose out as a result of the "end of an era".

The "new world order" at work in the Gulf

The Gulf war against Iraq was the first post-Cold War policing operation overtly led by the USA.

Why were the US and its lesser imperialist partners like Britain so concerned to get Iraq out of Kuwait? After all, other Middle Eastern countries such as Israel, Turkey or Syria, had invaded neighbouring territories without the US turning a hair.

To begin with, Kuwait was very special to imperialism. Besides its obvious strategic situation, this tiny statelet had been entirely controlled by British and US oil companies until the nationalisation of its oil assets in 1974. And even after this, BP and Gulf Oil (now part of Chevron) kept 40 per cent of the Kuwaiti Oil Company between them. Moreover, two thirds of the oil revenues accumulated by the tiny ruling class were invested in the US. By 1990, Kuwait had \$1bn worth of capital assets outside the country, which included hotels, art galleries, European and US Real Estate, and major shares in multinational corporations: 10 per cent of BP, 23 per cent of Hoechst, 14 per cent of Daimler Benz and 11 per cent of Midland Bank.

There was the issue of Kuwait's own oil - 9 per cent of world reserves. But the economic consequences of Iraq's seizure of Kuwait's oil production could still have been dealt with one way or another via negotiation.

The main reason for the reaction of imperialism to the occupation of Kuwait had more to do with the balance of power in the Middle East, which was so finely tuned to the interests of imperialism. The policy of imperialism



Saddam, once one of Washington's chief gunmen in the MidEast

through the eighties had reinforced Saddam Hussein and given him the means to bid for the role of regional strong man. Now they were obliged to cut him back down to size. And to achieve this, Kuwait proved to be a convenient auxiliary.

Tensions had mounted between Iraq and Kuwait in the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq war. While Saddam Hussein's regime was still armed to the teeth, the economy of Iraq was on the verge of bankruptcy. No further loans were on offer from imperialist banks so that the regime could start to repair the extensive damage from 8 years of war. And the Kuwaiti regime added to Iraq's problems by putting impossible demands on its economy - such as the repayment of \$15bn on account of war loans. This was pretty much the last straw for Saddam's regime, if not a provocation. The imperialist leaders must have known this. They could have forced Kuwait to scale down its demands. Instead they did nothing - no doubt because it served their policy towards Iraq.

Iraq expected the understanding of the US when it finally decided to invade Kuwait, offering in exchange assured oil supplies. In fact there is evidence that Saddam Hussein actually asked the US ambassador if the US would

oppose its invasion and was led to understand that it would not. Saddam Hussein therefore went ahead, occupying Kuwait and at least resolving the dispute it had with Kuwait over its access to the Gulf through the Shatt-al-Arab canal.

However Saddam's initiative did not meet the anticipated "understanding" from the imperialist powers. Quite the contrary. They set about blockading Iraq and building up a huge military force along the Iraqi border and in the neighbouring Gulf States. In fact all the evidence points to the fact that the US leaders jumped at this opportunity (assuming they had not created deliberately) to put their direct intervention policy into effect.

And this policy was successful, thanks to the fact that Saddam Hussein chose

to oppose no real military resistance to the imperialist aggression, thereby allowing imperialist casualties to be minimal. The Gulf War cured the "Vietnam Syndrome", at least among a significant section of the US public. At the same time it placed the US as the unquestioned military force leading and overseeing the "New World Order". In particular, by spelling out the catastrophic cost to be paid for any "unauthorised" infringement of existing borders or challenge to imperialist interests.

Dictators can always be handy

Of course the imperialist leaders were cynical enough to present this war as a war to protect the Iraqi population against a bloody and cruel dictator. They even spoke of deposing him. But their ground war stopped as soon as the Iraqi army had left Kuwait. They bombed the fleeing army, yes, but they left off at this point, leaving Saddam Hussein weakened but still firmly in charge.

This was the time when, sensing that Saddam Hussein's power was weakened, the Iraqi Kurds and Shiites rose, in the belief that they would be backed by the imperialist forces.

However, the US forces just stood back and allowed Saddam Hussein to

Getting involved

As we go to print the US is threatening an invasion of Iraq, while 75 Palestinians have been killed in the past five weeks. The need for an anti-imperialist movement has never been greater.

ACA activists are involved in anti-imperialist groups in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch. Come and join us.

Auckland

Contact: Daphna (021-037-4544), email wpnz@clear.net.nz or write P.O.

Box 10-282, Dominion Rd, Auckland.

Wellington

Contact: Paul (021-454-037) or Jared (3829766) or email:

jrpsoc@xtra.co.nz

Christchurch

The Middle East Information and Solidarity Collective meets every second Wednesday evening on campus. For info on meetings, email jwe21@it.canterbury.ac.nz or write to us at **P.O. Box 513**, Christchurch.

We are currently organising video and powerpoint showings, meetings, leafleting, stalls and pickets around the city.

Other areas

If there's no anti-imperialist or Anti-Capitalist Alliance group in your area, get in touch with us and we can help you set one up.

crush these uprisings. Indeed the Shiite rebellion, led by the pro-Iranian Iraqi Supreme Revolutionary Islamic Assembly, started in the area cordoned off by imperialist troops just after the end of the fighting. It soon spread to the holy towns of Najaf and Karbala, south of Baghdad. At the same time, Barzani's Democratic Party of Kurdistan announced that it was coordinating attacks against the Iraqi army in the north.

However, Sir Peter de la Billiere, head of British forces in the Gulf, summed up the response of imperialism in these terms: "We are not here to impose our law and restore law and order in Iraq. We are here to free Kuwait"

By 3 March, the rebellion had spread to 12 towns in the south and a similar number in the Kurdish north. In the south, however, the rebel troops began to lose ground. Contributing to the weakness of the rebels were the divisions between the fundamentalist opposition and those opposed to the setting up of an Islamic state. By the 23 March, General Schwartzkopf told a press conference in Ryad that US pilots had been instructed not to shoot down Iraqi helicopters as long as they kept away from Western troops. Meanwhile, in Washington, another leading US officer, Colin Powell, expressed the view that "Iraq should remain a united country in the best interests of the region". The position

of the US military was therefore spelt out. They wanted the uprisings crushed and they wanted Saddam Hussein to do it.

By the end of the month the Iraqi army loyal to Saddam Hussein had more or less succeeded in putting down the rebellions in the north and south. Altogether the reconquest of Iraqi Kurdistan by Saddam Hussein's army took only 8 days. And in fact it was precisely those helicopters, which Western troops were told to leave alone, which were decisive in this.

Despite the oft repeated claims of all the imperialist powers involved in the war that they wanted to free the Iraqi population and the oppressed minorities from Saddam Hussein's dictatorship, what they really wanted was another military coup, and another dictatorship to replace him. This was crudely expressed by John Major when he announced to the media outside Downing Street that the Iraqi army "is best placed to bring down Saddam Hussein's regime."

Indeed, in the imperialist power game the Kurds and Shiites were never meant to succeed. There is no doubt that the elimination of Saddam Hussein at some point would have been welcomed by imperialism. But not until there was someone strong enough to replace him, and, more importantly, strong enough to keep the population under his thumb and prevent a break-up of the country into rival small states,

which might destabilise the region further.

After the event the imperialist leaders cynically presented their "no-fly zones" policy as a humanitarian device to protect the Iraqi minorities. But by then, of course, it was too late. The uprisings had been crushed. Moreover, the Kurds, now pouring northwards towards Turkey had to face Turkish machine guns. And, of course, there was no question of the US using its leverage on the Turkish military to stop a massacre.

The Middle East under military surveillance

The past ten years of what can only be called an on-going war against Iraq has allowed imperialism some unprecedented gains in the region - unprecedented that is since the colonial era.

Thus the US have established a large permanent military presence in strategic positions in the Middle East. After the initial sharp reduction of US troops in the two years following the Gulf War, US forces have been steadily increased every time the US leaders decided to declare a crisis situation. The last time this happened was in 1998, in the run up to so-called operation "Desert Fox". Since then US forces have remained more or less at the same level - 26,000 troops, 30 warships (the VIth fleet is now permanently stationed in the Gulf) and

325 aircraft. This is in addition to the US forces stationed in air bases close to the Middle East, in Turkey and Greece - and, of course, to the small British contingent of 2,500 soldiers, six Tornados and a single aircraft carrier which allows Blair to pretend that he is one of the "big guys". In any case, there has not been such an imperialist garrison in the Middle East since the last years of colonisation after World War II.

This military build up is based on a series of agreements between the USA and several Gulf countries just after the Gulf War. The forerunner for these agreements was signed with Kuwait in September 1991. It was a 10-year renewable treaty which gave US forces the right to leave troops permanently in Kuwait and to use its airports freely for military purposes. The following month similar treaties were signed with Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. From these three positions, the US forces are in a strategic position to attack Iraq, Iran and Syria, the three most populated countries of the region, and to control sea traffic in the Gulf as well as the Red sea.

At the same time, Western arms manufacturers have had a field day selling weapons to their loyal allies. In this game, of course, the fact that US forces were in the driver's seat has allowed US multinationals to take the lion's share of the contracts. In just two years from 1992-93, over \$28bn worth of US weaponry was sold to Gulf countries, and this was on top of a massive order for 72 F-15 bombers made by Saudi Arabia.

Not all Middle Eastern states can afford to pay for such orders. So the US is stepping up its military aid to those who need it. Such is the case of Israel, of course. Although it is certainly not among the poorest states, US military aid to Tel Aviv stands to be increased from \$1.8bn in 1999 to \$2.4bn this year! Meanwhile, despite wholesale cuts in the US military budget, Egypt which has been in receipt of US military aid for many years, in fact since it agreed to sign the 1975 Camp David agreement, will retain its \$1.3bn allocation per year. All these billions, of course, are bound to return straight to US arms merchants in the form of new orders!

It must be said, however, that the US did leave a few crumbs for foreign competitors. So for instance, the



Oil fire; western intervention threatens to set the whole region alight

United Arab Emirates - a Sunni-dominated monarchy, which has objected to the US policy of support for Israel and continued sanctions against Iraq - has turned to France to buy tanks for \$3.8bn and Mirage fighters for \$5bn. It also intends to buy \$300m worth of the Franco-German Alpha jet fighter instead of the traditional British Hawk as a statement of disapproval for British towing of the US line. Even then, however, the UAE chose to be cautious by agreeing to buy \$8bn worth of Lockheed fighters from the US, though this deal is kept outstanding for the time being.

But whether the Gulf states buy their weapons from the US or its rivals, the Middle East has been turned into an arsenal for the repression of its populations. And the imperialist forces are now there, on the ground, to deal with the bigger problems.

What future for the Middle East?

The situation in the Middle East remains explosive. Nothing demonstrates this more than the present murderous action perpetrated by Israel against the Palestinians.

But the Gulf War itself had opened up all kinds of new conflicts even between the victors, not to mention those brewing in Iraq. Thus a border conflict has re-emerged between Bahrain and Qatar over the Hawar Islands, which are off the coast of Qatar but were given to Bahrain by the British for some obscure reason. Likewise Qatar is having a tiff with Saudi Arabia

over a corridor between Qatar and the UAE which links Saudi Arabia to the sea. Another border conflict has re-surfaced between Saudi Arabia and Yemen, etc.. In fact, over the whole of the Arabian peninsula, only two borders are covered by international treaties - that between Oman and Yemen, which was signed in 1992, and that between Kuwait and Iraq, which was imposed on Iraq by the UN, without Iraq's agreement. The possible sources of clashes in this part of the Middle East are almost too numerous to be listed.

Faced with these many intractable problems, all of them stoked by imperialism in the first place, the US has chosen the only reliable way it has to protect the interests of its corporations and behind them those of the other imperialist countries. It has established its own capacity in the region to be able to sort out any problems directly.

Of course it is a vicious circle. Because the more imperialism intervenes whether directly or by proxy - using the services of regional policemen like Israel - the more resentment it stokes up amongst populations who have every reason to be hostile already.

Today, in Palestine, the US is confronted with the consequences of a so-called "peace process" which was primarily designed to gain time and stop the Intifada. But this process could not have led anywhere since the implementation of the resulting agreement depended on the goodwill

of Israeli politicians. The US leaders knew this very well. And today, now that the Palestinians are losing patience, after six years of waiting, imperialism may soon be confronted with an even more profound Intifada. But, this time, instead of the accommodating Arafat they may find that the only "partner" they can talk to is Hezbollah, Hamas, or similar religious groups. In the end, the attempt at gaining time through the "peace process" will only have led to a deeper and more insoluble crisis. Yet the Palestinian threat to stability of the whole region, from the point of view of imperialism has to be contained somehow. Whether Clinton and Blair will leave this to Israel this time round is not yet clear. But what is certain is that they desperately need this latest Intifada to be crushed. And they know very well that Arafat is not and cannot be expected to be in control of the situation.

As for the on-going war against Iraq, the US could certainly afford to call this off after ten long years. Saddam Hussein could probably be expected to toe the line by now. However, this depends very much on whether the US manages to contain the reignited situation in neighbouring Israel/Palestine. Any perceived weakness in this regard on the part of imperialism could reinforce the Arab populations and encourage rival political factions in some of the region's states - who could play for advantage by taking an overt stance against Israel and the US. It could also strengthen the resolve of populations submitted to long-standing dictatorships - national minorities or even the Iranian working class which has shown signs of renewed militancy lately. For all these reasons, imperialism may choose to keep up the pressure on the Iraqi population, while increasing Iraq's oil export quota and allowing Western companies to do more business with Iraq. In that case, by forcing the Iraqi population to foot the bill, imperialism would be stoking another fire.

Therefore, whatever the choices made by imperialism and regardless of the strength of the military machine it builds up to protect its interests, it cannot prevent explosions from taking place among the exploited.

The problem is whether these explosions can produce something other than the catastrophic bloodshed

of the past. At different moments in the post-war period the Middle Eastern masses have had opportunities to represent a formidable force against exploitation and political repression. But at no time was there any political force willing to unite them in order for them to use their potential.

Despite their rhetoric, the Arab leaders have always stood for the status quo and the continuing exploitation of their own population. As one Palestinian quoted recently in the *Financial Times* put it "Arab leaders denounce Israel, they send medical aid to the West Bank and Gaza, but they'll never be united against Israel. Why don't they cut off oil to the west? Why don't they stop relations with Israel, even for a month?"

So far, despite the ongoing deterioration of the social conditions of the working class and poor of the region, their irrepressible resistance has been channelled into dead-ends - first that of a nationalism with a more or less socialist content, and today that of a nationalism deeply impregnated with the reactionary ideas circulated by fundamentalist groups.

And yet the one force that has never come to the fore across the region, and the only force that has no interest in making shady deals with imperialism is the force of the poor and the working class, all of them exploited by imperialism, all of them repressed whether by Saddam Hussein, Khatami, King Fahd, Assad of Syria, Mubarak of Egypt or Ehud Barak of Israel. An alliance of the poor masses, fighting for their own common interests, rather than for the setting up of yet more national borders or for the reactionary prejudices of a religion that belongs to a distant past, would be a tremendous unifying force in the Middle East. Such a fight would aim at getting rid of the artificial divisions created by imperialism across the region as well as the parasitic elites which live off these divisions. It would provide the youth who are prepared to risk their lives in the Gaza strip and Jerusalem, a perspective which is worth fighting for.

Today in the Middle East, there must be activists who are reasoning along these lines. We can only hope that tomorrow, they will take the initiative and propose such a perspective to the poor masses of the Middle East. In any case, this is their only way out of this

endless cycle of bloodshed.

For nearly a thousand years, the Middle East has been the target of Western European greed.

From the Crusades to imperialist conquest

It started as early as the Middle Ages, at a time when the region had reached a level of wealth and economic development somewhat higher than Western Europe. The Crusades were probably the most wide-ranging looting operation ever organised against the Middle East before imperialism turned the plundering of the Third World into an industry. However, the feudal lords who spearheaded the Crusades made sure that they had a highly commendable pretext - they claimed to be protecting a small Christian sect, known as the Maronites, against surrounding Muslims. Indeed Clinton and Blair were following a very ancient tradition when they sent their troops to the Gulf on behalf of oil multinationals under the pretext of protecting the Kuwaitis against Iraq.

In any case, the Crusades had a long-term impact since the political domination of the Maronite bourgeoisie remains one of the features of today's Lebanon.

After the Crusades, the Middle East became the focus of Western European attention for another reason - it was the main trading route, first by land and then by sea, between Europe and Asia. As such it became the focus of bitter rivalries between the emerging powers in Western Europe.

From the 16th century until World War I, however, the Ottoman Empire dominated most of the region. Few of today's independent states existed as separate entities. In order to consolidate their positions, the Western powers had to make compromises. So, they relied on bribing local strong men into protecting their interests against the Ottoman Empire, but, more importantly, against the local populations, by means of brutal repression. From this point of view, at least, there has been little change in most of the Middle East for well over a century.

The Somalia debacle

After the "victory" against Saddam Hussein, and the elimination, for the time being, of any further threat of destabilisation of the Middle Eastern



While the US received a bloody nose in Somalia, they still managed to kill several thousand Somalis

region by national minorities, US strategists probably thought their new policy of direct intervention was a great success.

However the next time they tried to implement it, close by, in Somalia, a country straddling the Horn of Africa at the entrance to the Suez Canal, it went horribly wrong.

This time the US, behind UN cover, staged the biggest intervention in the internal affairs of a Third World country ever seen so far. Because the reason for this intervention was aimed at setting up a state in the total vacuum of power which had resulted from long and bitter civil war.

Somalia, a semi-desert region inhabited by nomadic tribes who rely on cattle and livestock rearing was not the most obvious target for imperialism's attention. However it is in a strategic position, guarding the Suez gateway to the Arabian sea and Indian ocean. But in addition, it has oil and uranium deposits - the prospecting and exploitation rights being entirely in the hands of US and British multinationals.

A brief resumé of Somalia's post colonial history illustrates well the impact of the Cold War power games and their aftermath on this small and poverty-stricken country.

Siad Barre's regime had staged a successful military coup, garnished with socialist rhetoric in 1969, and happily backed by the Soviet Union. Soon after, however, Barre's invasion of Ethiopia, another country which enjoyed Russian support, was successfully repulsed, causing the Barre regime to break all

ties with the USSR. By 1980, it had succumbed to US pressure and agreed to allow the US to use their Berbera base for aircraft and nuclear submarines. Washington also agreed to supply the regime with \$40m worth of weapons.

In 1981, Barre followed the IMF's conditions for loans - and gained US investment as a result - which aimed to take control of Somalia's undeveloped uranium, oil and fishing industries. But this

meant, among other things, the removal of state food subsidies. The resultant huge rise in the cost of living triggered unrest and gave further impetus to opposition clans who accused Barre of being a US puppet. Nevertheless deals were made which more or less shared out the potential spoils of the country between a number of multinationals - Chevron, Conoco, Amoco and Phillips Petroleum. This only further discredited Barre's regime.

By 1988, civil war was raging. That year Barre's son-in-law, Mohammed Said Hersi was responsible for bombing to ashes the 400,000-strong town of Hargeisa, causing 50,000 deaths, and this was a major factor in the ousting of Barre's regime by 1991. But no faction was strong enough to take power and create a semblance of order. In 1992, the former British part of Somalia declared independence as the Republic of Somaliland. The northeast declared itself the Republic of Puntland. But the civil war went on regardless, so that by 1993, it had claimed 300,000 dead. In addition there were 425,000 refugees abroad and 350,000 internally displaced persons.

The US decided to intervene, since it was the interests of US companies which were being damaged. It sent its own troops initially, though under the cover of the UN, increasing these to 26,000. The UN added 12,000 additional troops from 20 UN nations. From the initial pretext of helping aid reach the population, the military brief soon changed to one of putting down the most powerful Somali faction led

by General Aidid, which represented the majority of the population, thereby providing unofficial backing to the vicious Mohammed Said Hersi, the "butcher of Hargeisa". The faction under General Aidid refused to agree to the plan the US tried to impose for a transitional government and attacked the UN forces, resulting in losses on both sides.

In 1993, US troops killed 1,000 civilians, mostly in one incident when 17 helicopter gunships were used in the centre of Mogadishu where General Aidid was meant to be holding a meeting. The intervention failed and the elite US Rangers were trapped between rooftop guns. Television cameras showed helicopters hovering over the streets while the marines inside shot passers-by indiscriminately. Compared to the 1,000 civilian dead, 18 US rangers were killed that day. But that proved too much for the US military and the troops who had failed in their mission to capture Aidid. In March 1994, the UN troops were withdrawn having resolved nothing. This time the US leaders' power games had backfired on them.

Stepping up the looting of the region

The main purpose of this massive armament is, above all, to allow Western companies to maximise their profits in the region. So what are imperialism's economic stakes in the region?

These stakes are huge. In every country in the region the same British, French, Italian, German and US corporations are actively grabbing new contracts to add to the already significant interests they control.

Between them, the six Gulf emirates, Iran and Iraq, hold 65 per cent of the world's total proven oil reserves. These countries also possess 30 per cent of the world's supplies of natural gas. But as the *Financial Times* noted in 1997:

Politics has played havoc with development of gas resources. Instead of pooling their energy assets and deregulating their economies, the contemporary history of these states is marked by mutual suspicion or outright hostility, coupled with an almost total dependence on foreign technology; and in the case of Iran and Iraq, fractious or non-existent relations with precisely those western countries



Iraqi family in mourning as another child dies as a result of UN sanctions

which can provide the technology they need.

In fact this puts in a nutshell the aspirations of the Western companies. It has been a matter of continuing despair for them that a proportion of the oil and gas resources (and indeed aluminium in the case of the UAE) remain in state hands. The only way that the Western companies have managed to get their hands on such state resources has been at the cost of investing in technological development, which is not the cheapest way to grab profits. This is why there has been so much pressure on these countries to privatise their state-run operations, but up to now with only limited success.

But since 1995, for instance, the Iranian bourgeoisie has shown its determination to get back into the world market, by encouraging foreign companies into petrochemical and gas export contracts. When Khatami was elected president, the economic liberalisation measures were stepped up, with foreign oil companies being invited to take part for the first time in the exploitation of terrestrial oil reserves. Total and Shell are to develop the South Pars gas field on the Gulf coast. A programme of privatisation, starting with the state electricity monopoly was launched in 1998, followed by 2,400 state companies along with three petrochemical complexes.

Attempts by the US to keep its imperialist rivals out of Iran in fact backfired. In 1995, the US government had decided to enforce, against its own companies which were reselling Iranian oil, the sanctions which had been in place all along but were increasingly ignored. It cancelled a contract negotiated by Conoco with the Iranian government. Clinton's decree that any other country investing more than \$20m (increased to \$40m in 1996) would be subject to US sanctions itself, was completely disregarded. France's Total took over the contract Conoco surrendered. Britain's Premier Oil, Shell, British Gas, GEC and others signed substantial contracts. Canada, Japan and smaller countries also signed contracts. So it is only a matter of time before US companies re-enter their former fiefdom.

And what of Iraq? To date the sanctions remain in place. But the greed of imperialist companies has begun to outweigh the political vengeance of Anglo-American foreign policy. As early as 1998, support for sanctions was beginning to fray, with divisions opening up between rival imperialists. As a result, the so-called "Desert Fox" operation which consisted of a 100-hour bombing of Iraq was a joint US-UK venture in which the other UN countries refused to be involved. As early as 1997, in fact, France's Elf Aquitaine and Total had obtained the future right to exploit two large oil fields

in southern Iraq - which probably explains France's refusal to have anything to do with "Desert Fox" at the time.

But US and British companies have also been involved in taking care of their future stakes in Iraq. The sixth largest US oil company, Conoco Inc., sent a delegation to Iraq in November 1999 to discuss "business opportunities", while Shell bid at the same time for 20-year exploitation rights for an oil field south of Basra. Since then all the Western companies as well as Russian, Chinese, Indian and Malaysian outfits have been signing agreements for future oil exploration and exploitation, for providing drilling equipment and for the development of gas export facilities.

In December 1999, 40 US congressmen signed a petition calling for economic sanctions to be removed. In May this year the *Wall Street Journal* wrote: "it is unclear which side is more isolated: the dictator who has successfully defied sanctions or the Anglo-US alliance that insists they remain in place."

Egypt is also attracting US companies with a programme of privatisation started by president Mubarak. So one US company, the Houston-based US oil explorer, Apache, has a £1bn investment in oil production (making up a third of its production base) and is prospecting for oil in the Western Desert. But British companies are also coining it in Egypt. BP Amoco has just changed its joint oil production venture with the government to a production-sharing one, investing £450m - and will be exploring for new oil reserves. As to Shell, it is already exploring the Western Desert and an offshore concession in the Mediterranean.

However, the relatively old Egyptian oil industry is rapidly being overshadowed by a rising natural gas industry. And who are the main players, developing this industry? British Gas and BP Amoco of the UK, ENI and Edison International of Italy, Resol of Spain and Shell.

The above is a reprint from a paper produced by the British organisation **Workers Fight** and was published as part of the International Communist Forum series. A selection of ICF pamphlets appear at www.union-communiste.org

One Year On In Afghanistan

Journalist **Robert Fisk** looks at the effects of Bush's war in Afghanistan on the countryside

President George Bush's "war on terror" reached the desert village of Hajibirgit at midnight on 22 May. Haji Birgit Khan, the bearded, 85-year-old Pushtu village leader and head of 12,000 local tribal families, was lying on a patch of grass outside his home. Faqir Mohamed was sleeping among his sheep and goats in a patch of sand to the south when he heard "big planes moving in the sky". Even at night, it is so hot that many villagers spend the hours of darkness outside their homes, although Mohamedin and his family were in their mud-walled house. There were 105 families in Hajibirgit on 22 May, and all were woken by the thunder of helicopter engines and the thwack of rotor blades and the screaming voices of the Americans.

Haji Birgit Khan was seen running stiffly from his little lawn towards the white-walled village mosque, a rectangular cement building with a single loudspeaker and a few threadbare carpets. Several armed men were seen running after him. Hakim, one of the animal herders, saw the men from the helicopters chase the old man into the mosque and heard a burst of gunfire. "When our people found him, he had been killed with a bullet, in the head," he says, pointing downwards. There is a single bullet hole in the concrete floor of the mosque and a dried bloodstain beside it. "We found bits of his brain on the wall."

Across the village, sharp explosions were detonating in the courtyards and doorways of the little homes. "The Americans were throwing stun grenades at us and smoke grenades," Mohamedin recalls. "They were throwing dozens of them at us and they were shouting and screaming all the time. We didn't understand their language, but there were Afghan gunmen with them, too, Afghans with blackened faces. Several began to tie up our women - our own women - and the Americans were lifting their burqas, their covering, to look at their faces. That's when the little girl was seen running away." Abdul Satar says that she was three years old, that she ran shrieking in fear from her home, that



Western bombers destroy Red Cross warehouse, Kabul, October 26, 2001

her name was Zarguna, the daughter of a man called Abdul-Shakour - many Afghans have only one name - and that someone saw her topple into the village's 60ft well on the other side of the mosque. During the night, she was to drown there, alone, her back apparently broken by the fall. Other village children would find her body in the morning. The Americans paid no attention. From the description of their clothes given by the villagers, they appeared to include Special Forces and also units of Afghan Special Forces, the brutish and ill-disciplined units run from Kabul's former Khad secret police headquarters. There were also 150 soldiers from the US 101st Airborne, whose home base is at Fort Campbell in Kentucky. But Fort Campbell is a long way from Hajibirgit, which is 50 miles into the desert from the south-western city of Kandahar. And the Americans were obsessed with one idea: that the village contained leaders from the Taliban and Osama bin Laden's al-Qa'ida movement.

A former member of a Special

Forces unit from one of America's coalition partners supplied his own explanation for the American behaviour when I met him a few days later. "When we go into a village and see a farmer with a beard, we see an Afghan farmer with a beard," he said. "When the Americans go into a village and see a farmer with a beard, they see Osama bin Laden."

All the women and children were ordered to gather at one end of Hajibirgit. "They were pushing us and shoving us out of our homes," Mohamedin says. "Some of the Afghan gunmen were shouting abuse at us. All the while, they were throwing grenades at our homes." The few villagers who managed to run away collected the stun grenades next day with the help of children. There are dozens of them, small cylindrical green pots with names and codes stamped on the side. One says "7 BANG Delay: 1.5 secs NIC-01/06-07", another "1 BANG, 170 dB Delay: 1.5s." Another cylinder is marked: "DELAY Verzagerung ca. 1,5s." These were the grenades that

terrified Zarguna and ultimately caused her death. A regular part of US Special Forces equipment, they are manufactured in Germany by the Hamburg firm of Nico-Pyrotechnik - hence the "NIC" on several of the cylinders. "dB" stands for decibels.

Several date stamps show that the grenades were made as recently as last March. The German company refers to them officially as "40mm by 46mm sound and flash (stun) cartridges". But the Americans were also firing bullets. Several peppered a wrecked car in which another villager, a taxi driver called Abdullah, had been sleeping. He was badly wounded. So was Haji Birgit Khan's son.

A US military spokesman would claim later that US soldiers had "come under fire" in the village and had killed one man and wounded two "suspected Taliban or al-Qa'ida members". The implication - that 85-year-old Haji Birgit Khan was the gunman - is clearly preposterous.

The two wounded were presumably Khan's son and Abdullah, the taxi driver. The US claim that they were Taliban or al-Qa'ida members was a palpable lie - since both of them were subsequently released. "Some of the Afghans whom the Americans brought with them were shouting 'Shut up!' to the children who were crying," Faqir Mohamed remembers.

"They made us lie down and put cuffs on our wrists, sort of plastic cuffs. The more we pulled on them, the tighter they got and the more they hurt. Then they blindfolded us. Then they started pushing us towards the planes, punching us as we tried to walk."

In all, the Americans herded 55 of the village men, blindfolded and with their hands tied, on to their helicopters. Mohamedin was among them. So was Abdul-Shakour, still unaware that his daughter was dying in the well. The 56th Afghan prisoner to be loaded on to a helicopter was already dead: the Americans had decided to take the body of 85-year-old Haji Birgit Khan with them.

When the helicopters landed at Kandahar airport - headquarters to the 101st Airborne - the villagers were, by their own accounts, herded together into a container. Their legs were tied and then their handcuffs and the manacle of one leg of each prisoner were separately attached to stakes driven into the floor of the container. Thick sacks were put over their heads.



Afghan children killed in Western bombing attacks

Abdul Satar was among the first to be taken from this hot little prison. "Two Americans walked in and tore my clothes off," he said. "If the clothes would not tear, they cut them off with scissors. They took me out naked to have my beard shaved and to have my photograph taken. Why did they shave off my beard? I had my beard all my life."

Mohamedin was led naked from his own beard-shaving into an interrogation tent, where his blindfold was removed. "There was an Afghan translator, a Pushtun man with a Kandahar accent in the room, along with American soldiers, both men and women soldiers," he says. "I was standing there naked in front of them with my hands tied. Some of them were standing, some were sitting at desks. They asked me: 'What do you do?' I told them: 'I am a shepherd - why don't you ask your soldiers what I was doing?' They said: 'Tell us yourself.' Then they asked: 'What kind of weapons have you used?' I told them I hadn't used any weapon.

"One of them asked: 'Did you use a weapon during the Russian [occupation] period, the civil war period or the Taliban period?' I told them that for a lot of the time I was a refugee." From the villagers' testimony, it is impossible to identify which American units were engaged in the interrogations. Some US soldiers were wearing berets with yellow or brown badges, others were in civilian clothes

but apparently wearing bush hats. The Afghan interpreter was dressed in his traditional salwah khameez. Hakim underwent a slightly longer period of questioning; like Mohamedin, he says he was naked before his interrogators.

"They wanted my age and my job. I said I was 60, that I was a farmer. They asked: 'Are there any Arabs or Taliban or Iranians or foreigners in your village?' I said 'No.' They asked: 'How many rooms are there in your house, and do you have a satellite phone?' I told them: 'I don't have a phone. I don't even have electricity.' They asked: 'Were the Taliban good or bad?' I replied that the Taliban never came to our village so I had no information about them. Then they asked: 'What about Americans? What kind of people are Americans?' I replied: 'We heard that they liberated us with [President Hamid] Karzai and helped us - but we don't know our crime that we should be treated like this.' What was I supposed to say?"

A few hours later, the villagers of Hajibirgit were issued with bright-yellow clothes and taken to a series of wire cages laid out over the sand of the airbase - a miniature version of Guantanamo Bay - where they were given bread, biscuits, rice, beans and bottled water. The younger boys were kept in separate cages from the older men. There was no more questioning, but they were held in the cages for another five days. All the while, the Americans were trying to discover the

identity of the 85-year-old man. They did not ask their prisoners - who could have identified him at once - although the US interrogators may not have wished them to know that he was dead. In the end, the Americans gave a photograph of the face of the corpse to the International Red Cross. The organisation was immediately told by Kandahar officials that the elderly man was perhaps the most important tribal leader west of the city.

"When we were eventually taken out of the cages, there were five American advisers waiting to talk to us," Mohamedin says. "They used an interpreter and told us they wanted us to accept their apologies for being mistreated. They said they were sorry. What could we say? We were prisoners. One of the advisers said: 'We will help you.' What does that mean?" A fleet of US helicopters flew the 55 men to the Kandahar football stadium - once the scene of Taliban executions - where all were freed, still dressed in prison clothes and each with a plastic ID bracelet round the wrist bearing a number. "Ident-A-Band Bracelet made by Hollister" was written on each one. Only then did the men learn that old Haji Birgit Khan had been killed during the raid a week earlier. And only then did Abdul-Shakour learn that his daughter Zarguna was dead.

The Pentagon initially said that it found it "difficult to believe" that the village women had their hands tied. But given identical descriptions of the treatment of Afghan women after the US bombing of the Uruzgan wedding party, which followed the Hajibirgit raid, it seems that the Americans - or their



UN building in Kabul after US-British bombing raid on the city, October 8, 2001

Afghan allies - did just that. A US military spokesman claimed that American forces had found "items of intelligence value", weapons and a large amount of cash in the village. What the "items" were was never clarified. The guns were almost certainly for personal protection against robbers. The cash remains a sore point for the villagers. Abdul Satar said that he had 10,000 Pakistani rupees taken from him - about \$200 (£130). Hakim says he lost his savings of 150,000 rupees - \$3,000 (£1,900). "When they freed us, the Americans gave us 2,000 rupees each," Mohamedin says.

"That's just \$US40. We'd like the rest of our money." But there was a far greater tragedy to confront the men when they reached Hajibirgit. In their absence - without guns to defend the homes, and with the village elder dead and many of the menfolk prisoners of the Americans - thieves had descended on Hajibirgit. A group of men from Helmand province, whose leader is Abdul Rahman Khan - once a brutal and rapacious "mujahid" fighter against the Russians, and now a

Karzai government police commander - raided the village once the Americans had taken away so many of the men. Ninety-five of the 105 families had fled into the hills, leaving their mud homes to be pillaged.

The disturbing, frightful questions that creep into the mind of anyone driving across the desert to Hajibirgit today are obvious. Who told the US to raid the village? Who told them that the Taliban leadership and the al-Qa'ida leadership were there? Was it, perhaps, Abdul Rahman Khan, the cruel police chief whose men were so quick to pillage the mud-walled homes once the raid was over? For today, Hajibirgit is a virtual ghost town, its village leader dead, most of its houses abandoned. The US raid was worthless. There are scarcely 40 villagers left. They all gathered at the stone grave of Zarguna some days later, to pay their respects to the memory of the little girl. "We are poor people - what can we do?" Mohamedin asked me. I had no reply. President Bush's "war on terror", his struggle of "good against evil" descended on the innocent village of Hajibirgit.

And now Hajibirgit is dead.

The above is reprinted from the British paper, *The Independent*, August 5, 2002



Former adviser to US corporation Unocal and ex-Taliban support Hamid Karzai now runs Afghanistan for the United States

Repression and resistance in Turkish jails

Scores of political prisoners have died on hunger strike in Turkey. **Daphna Whitmore** investigates

Since October 2000 nearly one hundred political captives in Turkey's jails have died on hunger strike. Turkey's jails are among the most grotesque hell-holes on earth. There are thousands of political prisoners and prisoners of war who are subjected to beatings, torture, solitary confinement, denial of medical care and various physical attacks. There have been dozens of prison assaults where the authorities have conducted premeditated massacres. In these conditions the political captives have shown great courage and determination to uphold their political beliefs and struggle to win even the most basic rights. The prisons have become an arena for the class struggle being waged in Turkey between the exploited masses and the fascist state.



Thousands in hunger strikes

Often the political captives have held hunger strikes because they had few ways of defending themselves. The hunger strikes are not isolated incidents or the actions of a handful of political captives, they have involved tens of thousands of people inside the prisons, and many outside. Hunger strikers are supported by their families, by political activists, civil rights workers, unionists and have mobilised public opinion, to let the world know the horrors of life in Turkey's prisons. The following figures show the scale of the hunger-strike movement in Turkey:

* In June-July 1983 a hunger strike at Istanbul prisons involved around 2,500 political captives

* October-November 1988 more than 2000 captives took part in hunger strike protests in around 20 prisons throughout Turkey

* July-August 1995 nearly 10,000 prisoners of war from the Kurdish Workers Party (the PKK) carried out a hunger strike

* May-August 1996 in 33 prisons some 1,500 prisoners took part in an indefinite hunger strike and death fast.

* On 24 September 1996 a mass hunger strike protest against a prison massacre was carried out by 11,500 political captives.

Democratic rights denied

Although Turkey has a parliamentary tradition which dates back to 1870

basic democratic rights have been systematically denied the people. The Turkish ruling class has held on to its privileges with brute force – ruling the country through a military dictatorship at times, other times behind a very thin parliamentary facade.

A right-wing military coup in 1980

marked a period of intensified repression. The military junta banned all strikes and mass actions, shut down trade unions and imprisoned more than 650,000 people in the first few years of its rule. Tens of thousands of people were tortured and thrown into dungeons. The regime sought to break

State terror acts in Turkey, 1994-1997

(figures from a report by the Turkish Human Rights Association)

Unsolved murders and attacks	1,578
Wounded	182
Summary executions and deaths in custody	724
Deaths at armed confrontations	14,267
Those killed in acts targeting civilians	958
Those wounded in acts targeting civilians	1,267
Those declared to be lost in custody	808
Those who have been tortured	3,124
Those who have been taken into custody	76,688
Those arrested	6,654
Vacated villages and hamlets	1,834
Bombed sites	611
Associations, unions or publications that have been shut down	508
Associations, unions or publications that have been raided	639
Members of the press that have been taken into custody	1,180
Those held in prison for their opinions	466

Source: *Portrait of a Terrorist State*, Garbis Altinoglu (2001)

the will of the captives to turn them into submissive subjects. During this time Kurdish prisoners were subjected to the most extreme degradations as Turkish fascism attempted to crush the independence movement.

But the captives – Kurdish and Turkish – were not defeated, they carried on struggles to win basic rights in the prisons. By the end of the 1980s captives had some won some concessions such as the right to wear civilian clothing, to communicate with people outside prison, to have reading material and to be able to have special foods brought in for the sick.

By the early 1990s the regime again intensified its repression and again the prisoners took up many forms of resistance including hunger strikes.

Relatives of the political captives are themselves subjected to similar treatment by the authorities. This includes total bans on visits and correspondence – sometimes lasting months and years. They are often subjected to humiliating searches and sexual harassment. Many have taken up similar forms of struggle on the outside – taking part in hunger strikes, keeping watch in front of prisons for days and weeks. Some have been detained, beaten and tortured, some killed.

The struggle against isolation

Last year over 1000 left-wing prisoners were transferred to new jails, known as F-types, where they are held in isolation or in groups of two or three, after security forces stormed jails across the country. Prisoners in the F-type jails are kept locked up and are not even allowed out of their cells for recreation or proper exercise. According to a statement by Amnesty International 'many inmates in the new prisons had allegedly gone without human contact for days, "apart from roll-calls, which are said to be frequently accompanied by violence"'. (BBC April 24, 2001)

The isolation imposed in the F-type prisons is a form of brutal torture. It is this which has prompted so many political captives to take up death-fasts. Their deaths are not suicides, they are the protests of people who want to live but are compelled to struggle against extreme repression.

Anti-Intervention

Continued from p2



Palestinian leftists protest Israeli oppression

power of the state. The 'war on terror' arsenal is, however, mostly being aimed at Third World countries.

Many in the peace movement counsel reliance on the United Nations and other institutions of the 'international community' as an alternative to Washington and its allies/toadies. But we can expect no justice from organisations such as the UN as they are dominated and used by the big powers to further their interests. George Bush Snr used the United Nations to back the imperialist alliance in the Gulf War in 1991 and to impose the sanctions. Right now Bush Jnr has been jockeying to get UN support for a direct invasion of Iraq. If he gets the United Nations' blessing would it make the war any less predatory, any less murderous? Not one iota. Helen Clark, while lukewarm about a US-led war, has said the Labour-led government will support an Iraq invasion under UN auspices. We might also remember that it was the UN that voted to set up the state of Israel and dispossess the Palestinians.

As for New Zealand, not only did this country participate in the Gulf War in 1991, it also provided a

frigate to help maintain the murderous blockade. If a new war on Iraq is launched Bush and co. understand that no real opposition will come from the Labour Government. Labour has a very long history of backing Western wars of intervention.

New Zealand is no great power on the world scene, but it is a junior imperialist in partnership with the United States. The wealthy nations enjoy much of their privileges on the backs of the people of the oppressed countries, which are bled dry by various methods of coercion. Any sign of resistance is met with force.

The history of the twentieth century shows that imperialism – capitalism in its monopoly stage – means war. Wars to redivide the world, to plunder and exploit, that is the lifeblood of the system. The present world order is one where the powers strive for domination not freedom. As long as the system remains so will all its problems. That is why it is not enough to feel outraged about unjust wars - what is needed is an anti-imperialist movement to challenge the very system. A core part of the work of the Anti-Capitalist Alliance is the building of such an anti-interventionist, anti-imperialist movement. Come and join us.

Daphna Whitmore

Join the Anti-Capitalist Alliance

The past two decades have seen both Labour and National-led governments enact all sorts of anti-worker laws and carry out reforms which enrich the already privileged sections of society. The sale of state assets, the anti-worker laws, the imposition of GST, the closure of hospitals - the list goes on and on - dozens of unpopular measures have been imposed by Labour and National. All the while, the gap between rich and poor has grown wider.

Greater wealth has been concentrated in the hands of those at the top. For instance, whereas in 1971 the top three percent owned 20 percent of the wealth, they now own 37 percent. In the two and a half years of the present Labour/Alliance government, the people on the NZ Rich List have seen a 17 percent rise in their wealth, while nurses, teachers and other workers are offered paltry pay increases.

This is the kind of situation that the current government, every bit as much as National and ACT, are dedicated to preserving. Anyone who doubts this should just consider how this government has not even lifted the dole, solo parents' benefit and widows' benefit back to the levels they were at before the huge cuts of 1991.

How much we can do depends on how many people support our efforts: by signing up to the ACA - for instance, if we can sign up 500 people we can get on the national ballot for the party vote - by donating to the campaign, so we can produce the election publicity we need, and by getting involved in the campaign work. There's plenty for everyone to do, and every bit of support is needed and helpful. If you agree with the broad thrust of our basic platform and have had enough of being affected by decisions made by a few politicians in the interests of the rich, then sign up now and get involved. You can never start too soon to fight for your own emancipation!



New political movement

The Anti-Capitalist Alliance was formed by the Workers Party, **revolution** and independent left activists to run in the 2002 elections to present socialist ideas. We are continuing, with the aim of building a new political movement based on workers' interests. Below is our platform:

1. Opposition to all NZ and Western intervention in the Third world and all Western military alliances.

2. Jobs for all with living wage and shorter week.

3. For the unrestricted right of workers to organise and take industrial action and no limits on workers' freedom of speech and activity.

4. For working class unity and solidarity - equality for women, Maori and other ethnic minorities and gay men and women; open borders and full rights for migrant workers.

5. For a working people's republic.

Join the ACA: write to WPNZ,

P. O. Box 10-282, Dominion Road, Auckland; or **revolution**, P.O. Box 513, Christchurch.

Email: anticapitalists@hotmail.com

