

War against Iraq a 'disaster,' says French Nobel Prize economist

by Mark Burdman

French Nobel Prize economist Maurice Allais condemns the allied war against Iraq as a war that should have and could have been prevented, one which left the Middle East in a situation worse than before it began, and which was a moral defeat for the West. "The Middle East finds itself today in a situation worse than that of July 1990," Allais writes in a seven-page article in *Le Figaro Magazine* entitled "Balance of the War: A Disaster."

The article, portrayed in the sub-headline as a counter to French President François Mitterrand's statements on July 14 that Iraq could soon face a new military intervention, is a blistering attack on the war by one of the more influential spokesmen within the French establishment, but it is only one of a series of attacks from across the political spectrum of leading forces in France, which were published in late July.

Allais stresses that the war "could have been avoided, and should not have taken place." He draws special attention to the historical roots of the Gulf-Middle East crisis, in the policy approaches to the region of the British and the Americans. He attacks the superficiality of beginning any discussion on the Gulf crisis, from the moment of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Rather, one must begin from a "longer historical perspective, notably from the consequences of the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire and of the two world wars. . . . To a significant extent, the policy followed by the West, following the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire and from the two world wars, is responsible for the economic instability of the Middle East."

The borders in the region "have been determined, essentially, as a function of the particular interests of the big Western powers, and most particularly of Great Britain and the United States. The very artificial borders of these [Middle East] states, their very unequal petroleum resources, the establishment of the state of Israel, and the policy of the great powers, have been determining factors in the permanent crisis in the Middle East," Allais writes.

It is to British policy in the Gulf, he insists, that one must

trace the historical roots of the Iraq-Kuwait conflicts, and it is simply too facile to regard Iraq's August 1990 move into Kuwait as a tragedy that came out of nowhere. According to Allais, there is much more justification in Iraq's case against Kuwait than the international media indicated.

The U.S. could have prevented war

The Bush administration bears a heavy responsibility for having failed to prevent a major crisis in the Gulf, Allais continues. After asking questions about U.S. actions, or failure to act, in July 1990, as the affair was escalating, including some questions about the activities of U.S. Ambassador in Baghdad April Glaspie, the Nobel Prize economist writes: "Whatever, one objective fact dominates over any other question. The United States abstained from addressing a public and stern warning to Saddam Hussein in the fourth week of July, and by itself, this abstention establishes, seriously and indisputably, the American responsibility in the later evolution of developments."

In the ensuing phases of the crisis, Allais insists, the United States made war inevitable by excluding any compromise and demanding "all or nothing" from Iraq. It was "certainly unreasonable," he claims, to demand "a total and unconditional withdrawal from Kuwait. . . . It could only be considered as humiliating and unacceptable by Saddam Hussein, ferociously nationalistic and fundamentally opposed to any Western domination." A compromise with Saddam was not impossible, and, besides, it was totally "unjustified and fundamentally unreasonable" for the U.S. to insist on no link existing between the Kuwait matter and the Palestinian and Lebanese questions.

Allais writes that the "new world order" as defined by George Bush and allies is intolerable. "Without question, since the collapse of the Berlin Wall on Nov. 9, 1989, a new era of the history of the world had begun. The world today must be reformed and a new international order is necessary. However, this international order should not be based on the oppression and humiliation of some and the insolent domina-

tion of others. The new international order that we strongly feel we need, must be based on equity and on justice, on an equal respect for all peoples, not proclaimed on by-ways in solemn declarations, but practiced in concrete realities each day. It must be founded on ethical principles that are at the basis of our humanist civilization.”

By contrast, “the claimed new world order in the Middle East amounts, in fact, to a return to the *status quo ante*, with simply a reinforcement of American domination.” The various key countries in the region, Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Israel, are all involved in massive rearmament programs, seeing in such acquisitions the only way to maintain their independence and to survive.

‘Infantile’ judgments unjustified

The “triumphalist, in truth, infantile judgments” in the Western countries about the Gulf war, are totally unjustified, in view of the consequences of the war, writes Allais. What is the “balance” of the war? “The cynical abandonment of Lebanon to Syria; immense destruction in Kuwait and in Iraq; probably 100,000 dead (military and civilian) at least, if not much more, on the Iraqi side; the uprising of Shiite and Kurdish populations, stirred up by ill-considered declarations by, if not the encouragement of, the United States; a merciless civil war, with new destruction, and thousands, if not tens of thousands, of new victims; . . . considerable economic difficulties for all the countries of the Middle East; the threat of epidemics in Iraq and a rise in mortality, particularly among children, due to malnutrition; the exasperation of hatreds among all the populations of the Middle East; negative effects on the Western economies.”

His biting comment: “Contrary to all affirmations based on giant disinformation and an unprecedented manipulation of public opinion, the balance of this war is not, as is being said generally, a stunning victory for law and justice, the final point of announcement of a new world order. It is an immense disaster for a large part of the populations of the Middle East, and a moral defeat for the Western countries.”

He adds: “The responsibility of the United States, as that of Iraq, is very heavy, but the responsibility of the strong is, without doubt, morally greater than that of the weak. To inflict, today, such large-scale suffering on millions of Iraqis, to maintain the embargo in order to destabilize Saddam Hussein, is also not a reasonable policy.”

Other voices in France blast Gulf war

Seconding Allais’s critique are agronomist René Dumont and Gen. Pierre Gallois. Dumont, writing on page 2 of the daily *Le Monde* of July 24, under the title “The Massacre Continues,” castigates the Gulf war as a classical “colonial war,” in which tens of thousands more Iraqis died than either Americans or Frenchmen. “But the massacre is not finished,” he stresses. Iraq’s population now lacks potable water, electricity, and other necessities. This is worsened by the embar-

go, yet “no one in a position of responsibility speaks of easing it.” This is “semi-genocide” against the Iraqis.

Dumont characterizes as “shameful” the priority placed on bombing civilian infrastructure, stressing that this was never authorized by the United Nations. “By associating us with this massacre, President Mitterrand has dishonored us. By prolonging the embargo, he accentuates our responsibility.”

Gen. Pierre Gallois, in a feature in the liberal-socialist weekly *Le Nouvel Observateur* at the end of July, charges that the main thrust of the Gulf war was to “return to a pre-industrial state the country which was the most developed in the Middle East after Israel.”

Gallois charges that no U.N. Security Council resolution ever authorized using force to “throw this country several decades back in time by annihilating its efforts for development.” But now it is admitted, even in the United States, this so-called “surgical” war meant, in reality, “the end of, if not modern Iraq, at least an Iraq on the path of accelerated modernization.”

Gallois is one of the very few recent commentators to focus on Iraq’s infrastructure development efforts years before the war: “In the course of the last 15 years, the Baghdad government had succeeded in creating the infrastructure indispensable to the transformation of the country into a nascent industrial power: a vast network of highways, extension of secondary linkage routes . . . generalized electrification . . . extension of telephone lines to the countryside,” and modern food storage. Almost the totality of this was annihilated, in five weeks, by 90,000 tons of bombs.

Hypocrisy

Iraq had every right to develop its military capabilities, and those countries saying the opposite are utter hypocrites, General Gallois insists. “After 30 or so more advanced countries, including the United States, had helped to make Iraq a big military power, these same nations joined a coalition to destroy the military apparatus that they had contributed to construct. . . . At the time, no government complained to the Iraqis that they were devoting too much of their revenues to armaments; to the contrary, the supplier states figured that Iraq had not shown itself willing enough to spend.

“Besides,” he goes on, “didn’t Iraq have the right to be concerned about its security?” He cites the potential strategic threats to Iraq from nuclear-armed Israel; from Soviet-armed Syria; and from the fundamentalists of Iran to the east.

The international community never reacted the way it did over Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait when Pol Pot committed atrocities in Cambodia, nor when the Chinese invaded Tibet, nor when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, nor when Syria effectively annexed Lebanon, nor, for that matter, when the U.S. intervened in Panama, writes General Gallois. All of these other cases met, at most, with a statement of “regret” from the U.N. Security Council.