



US Warship Guadalcanal in the Gulf

prop exercises than serious attempts to undermine US presence, the Islamic Republic's rhetoric against «the Great Satan» has a hollow ring. Actually, the Iranian leadership's intransigence and expansion of the war zone had three results that are much to the US's liking. One, it gave the excuse for upgraded US intervention. Two, it further inflamed chauvinism on both sides of the war front, allowing the reactionary regimes to reunite the Arab ranks (with few exceptions) against a secondary enemy and for closer military cooperation with the US. Third, it offered up its own people and resources as a testing ground for Reagan's air-land-sea battle plans.

The US attacks have served as much needed maneuvers with live ammunition to test US special forces and improve coordination between the different armed services. A week before the ambush of the *Iran Ajr*, US Navy Admiral Crowe visited the Gulf with a plan cleared by Reagan for discovering and foiling Iranian minelaying, and to follow up implementation of the 1986 defense reorganization act for shortening the chain of command, increasing the powers of theater commanders and putting the assets of all the services at their disposal - in short, making death and destruction more efficient.

The ambush itself involved Air Force spy planes and probably satellites, the AWACS stationed in Saudi Arabia and the Orion P-3s based in Oman, Navy ships and commandos (SEALS) and the elite Army helicopter unit called the Nightstalkers. This unit, officially called Task Force 160, was formed in 1981 and trained for storms and night flying, after the US's debacle in the desert trying to retrieve hostages from Iran in 1980. Task Force 160 participated in the invasion of Grenada, and like the SEALS, has been linked to the now supposedly disbanded Seaspray unit that joined the CIA's attacks on Nicaragua's coast.

The attack on the *Iran Ajr* was deemed the US's first military success in the wake of a string of fiascos in the Middle East, and 78% of the American public voiced approval - a pattern evidenced in relation to the ensuing attacks as well. Not only could Reagan give his forces battle - training and reassure local reactionaries; the administration is capitalizing on its war against Iran to restore its domestic prestige.

#### NATO AND ARAB COOPERATION

With over 40 warships, 15,000 sailors and a barge converted into a floating naval base in the central Gulf, the US hopes to recoup its active leadership of both the imperialist and Arab reactionary alliance. With its major NATO allies involved in coordinated action, at least in relation to minesweeping, the US is in an ideal position to demand more military coordination with the Gulf states, a goal it has sought since the 1979 demise of the Shah regime and the formation of the Rapid Deployment Forces. Some Gulf states, despite public denials, are indirectly taking part in the war on Iran, mobilizing their forces and pledging landing rights and other facilities to the US forces. The long-delayed and hidden military role of the Gulf Cooperation Council is becoming more pronounced. Most important, Egypt is reportedly sending pilots and military equipment to support Kuwait against Iran, a military precursor to the Arab Summit's decision that left Arab states free to restore relations with the Camp David regime. In return, the Saudis, together with the UAE and Kuwait, have worked out an economic aid package to help the Egyptian regime out of its economic problems, for which the US refuses to provide genuine aid.

Still, despite the apparent US success in the Gulf, Reagan has embarked on a risky venture. So far, the US Congress

has given the administration an easy time, delaying efforts to invoke the War Powers Act that requires the president to inform Congress within 48 hours of committing troops to an area of «imminent hostilities» and to withdraw them within 60 days unless Congress agrees to an extension. However, this will change if US forces incur casualties of any significant size.

In the longer run, the US public and Congress can also be disturbed about the economic costs of the war effort. For example, the destruction of the Iranian offshore oil installation, which the White House called a «measured and appropriate response», was an hour and a quarter attack in which Navy destroyers fired 1,065 shells at a cost of \$1,000 each. Ironically, this barely preceded the stock market crash which most observers have attributed to investors' unease at the size of the US budget and trade deficit - facts not unrelated to the Reagan Administration's flagrant military spending. As of now, the Reagan Administration has spent \$1.9 trillion in the biggest 'peacetime' budget ever for the country. A new rearmament plan would require spending another \$1.8 trillion by 1992, and the money simply may not be there (Newsweek, November 16th).

It cannot be ruled out that the Reagan Administration will blow up its war on Iran to justify increased military spending. Still, a host of domestic and international factors mitigate against the US involving itself in an all-out war. The Reagan Administration's tilt towards Iraq does not extend to the point of insuring an Iraqi victory in the war. Rather it is negatively determined - to ward off the upheaval which an Iranian victory would almost certainly unleash, for this would threaten the pro-US, oil monarchies. The US continues to view the Gulf war as a way of weakening both Iraq and Iran, while simultaneously tightening its own military network in the region.

Exploiting the political contradictions that the US may face, if it continues its Gulf adventure, requires a mature assessment of reality and a consistent anti-imperialist stand. Unfortunately, neither of the Gulf war combatants have exhibited such qualities, thus condemning their own people and resources to continuing the vicious cycle of destruction.

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