

there is no wonder that the Israeli leadership is disturbed by the prospects of peace in the Gulf. Not only does the Zionist state stand to lose an outlet for its arms industry; it loses a primary device for deflecting both attention and resources away from the battle against its own illegal existence, occupation and aggression. As the most prominent Israeli military commentator, Zeev Schiff, remarked, «If the Iraq-Iran war stops, this means the end of eight fat years for Israel.»

US MANEUVERING

The US welcomed the end of the war, but this does not mean that its real position contradicts that of its Israeli ally. Rather, the US has broader interests to pursue in the region and is following a different set of tactics in the diplomatic arena. Under the impact of the Soviet global peace offensive and its own scandals, the Reagan Administration has found it opportune for the UN to have a role vis-a-vis the Iraq-Iran conflict. So, to preface its diplomatic maneuvering, the State Department responded to the ceasefire by terming it «a major triumph for the president's foreign policy,» while other US officials credited the US war fleet with having had a decisive impact on the Iranian decision.

In fact, the US position is double-edged for the possible end of the war has both pro's and con's from the imperialist vantage point. On the one hand, the US had reason to rejoice that the war will probably end with a «no winner - no loser» stalemate. The two combatant countries have been ravaged, leaving no dominant regional power to challenge strategic US control of the oil fields. The end of the war might also lead to the stabilization of the Egyptian-Saudi-Jordanian-Iraqi alliance in a way which would bolster a reactionary status quo in the region.

On the other hand, the end of the war would remove the rationale for extensive US military presence in the area, and the administration will have to find new excuses. Still, there are signs that a partial scale-down is deemed better anyway to avoid disasters that might lead to public pressure for bringing the troops home. US imperialism surely

prefers to use the situation to try and reassert its old alliance with Iran, by working to change the Iranian leadership or encouraging so-called moderate elements within the present government. The Israeli leadership, incidentally, has similar intentions.

Significantly, the Iranian decision followed close on the heels of the biggest single US crime committed in the Gulf to date - the July 3rd shooting down of the Iranian civilian airliner by the USS Vincennes, killing all 290 passengers. In retrospect, it appears as a classical example of gunboat diplomacy with the US trying to scare Iran into submission. In this connection, one should view the article in *Newsweek*, July 18th, by Henry Kissinger, the notorious former US Secretary of State:

Citing US goals of «freedom of navigation» in the Gulf, preventing «Soviet domination» and preserving «the territorial integrity of friendly states,» Kissinger noted: «Fundamentally, there are few nations in the world with less reason to quarrel and more compatible interests than Iran and the United States. Though the shah came to symbolize the friendship between the two countries in the 1970s, those interests did not depend on him. They reflected political and strategic realities that continue today. This unfortunate accident may provide the occasion to reopen a dialogue with Teheran. As part of the process, the United States could agree to pay compensation to the families of the airline victims - but put the money into escrow until there is a ceasefire in the Iran-Iraq war and American hostages in Lebanon are released.»

When Iran was on the offensive, the US entered into an alliance with Iraq; now it is planning how to put both countries in a new form of dependency. In this light, one can evaluate the State Department's condemnation of Iraqi use of chemical gas as «totally unjustified and abhorrent,» just before the US Congress approved economic sanctions against Iraq for the same reason. While the use of chemical weapons against the Kurdish people - or anyone - merits only condemnation, one cannot but doubt US intentions in view of its selective imposition of sanctions

whereby pro-US regimes committing comparable crimes are often shielded. The US measures are less due to concern for the Kurdish people than a threat to Iraq not to rejoin the confrontation front against 'Israel'.

AN OPPORTUNITY

The possibility of ending the Iraq-Iran war creates new objective conditions in the area, which could influence the course of the Arab-Zionist conflict and the regional balance of forces. It is indisputably to the advantage of the Palestinian and Arab national cause, and in line with long-standing calls from progressive nationalist forces for mobilizing all resources against the main enemy. It has removed all excuses for diverting attention from the main struggle or from the main current question of supporting the Palestinian uprising.

Taking full advantage of the new possibilities requires a political decision on the part of the two combatants in the war, and on the part of all the regimes that have aligned themselves in accordance with this war rather than the struggle against Zionist aggression. The pivotal point here is whether the Arab nationalist regimes can seize the chance to make a strong, new nationalist front which would limit Israeli aggression and US maneuvers in the area. Forming such a front would entail resolving the conflict between Iraq and Syria, and an Iraqi decision to rejoin the Arab confrontation front. Unfortunately, until now, the Iraqi regime has capitalized on the ceasefire with Iran to launch an intense attack on the Kurdish people.

The prospect of ending the war also raises the question of democracy with new urgency. Whereas the war provided an excuse for internal oppression in both Iran and Iraq, and in a number of neighboring countries, its end will give new space for raising the popular demands for democracy and economic justice.

All peoples of the area welcomed the end of the war. The stand taken by each government as to what to do in the aftermath will provide a yardstick for assessing their commitment to the Arab national cause and its core, the Palestinian question, and the struggle to end Zionist occupation. ●