

POLITICS



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## The Gulf Crisis in Europe

by Tomislav Sunic

Whatever may be the outcome of the crisis in the Gulf, one thing is already certain: European intellectuals will no longer be polarized along ideological lines, but divided along geopolitical fault lines. For the first time the European right is marching hand-in-hand with the European left, in common protest against the U.S. involvement in the Gulf. For the first time also the conservative press in Europe is printing anti-war articles whose pacifist tenor could easily outdo any leftist journal. By contrast, many former "sixty-eighters" who until recently tinkered with instant pacifism and global order under the banner of Marx, have discovered the glitter of the Stars and Stripes. That the emperor can swiftly change his garb is evident in France, where the former Marxist Régis Debray advocates the return of Europe to Europeans, while the former cheerleader of Maoism, Bernard Henry Lévy, praises the American war machine and its unflinching support of Israel.

The attitude of European conserva-

tives towards American involvement in the Gulf is complex on both geopolitical and philosophical counts. Before World War II, European conservatives of all stripes had a low opinion of America, a country they felt was exporting decadence, unwilling to give up its globalist preaching, and unable to reign in its marauding plutocratic and anational elites. After the war this hostile attitude markedly changed, partly because in the face of the real Communist threat coming from the East, the Hollywood culture of the West seemed the lesser evil.

Several years ago, when the spirit of Yalta came to an end in Eastern Europe, anticommunism lost its *raison d'être*. Its place had to be filled by the conservative *risorgimento* against liberal anomie and its major standard-bearer, the United States of America. Unlike their counterparts in America, European conservative militants, be they of traditional, nationalist, or revolutionary inclination, come from a pool of articulate and witty thinkers whose efforts are often put to the service of seemingly unpopular political platforms. Jean Marie Le Pen, the head of the French National Front, or Pino Rauti of the extreme right Movimento Sociale Italiano, their shrill nationalism notwithstanding, usually rely, behind the scenes, on the brains of those with prestigious academic and literary credentials.

The very independent-minded "New Right," probably one of the most outspoken groups of intellectuals operating today in Europe, has made no secret of its opposition to American Mideast policy. Its chief figure, Alain de Benoist, sees in the American presence in the Gulf the attempt of a dying global power to overextend its global ideology to peoples who might have a radically different idea of the world. In several of his recent pieces, Benoist compares American decision-makers to "world improvers," who, as true heirs of the biblical manifesto, endlessly search for the archetypes of evil: Indians, Germans, Communists, and

now, at the end of the century, the camel-riding, bomb-throwing, Israel-hating Arabs. In a sense, European conservative criticism of American foreign policy suggests that the American elites are incompetent to understand foreign traditional cultures; hence, when they fail to overawe their opponents either with money or the ideology of human rights, they must resort to airborne policing. Predictably, Benoist's current writing is more reminiscent of a paleo-leftist militant than of somebody with impeccable conservative credentials. Needless to say, few if any European conservatives believe in the U.S. pledge to uphold the rule of law in the Gulf. Most of them, along with an increasing number of leftists, concur that the purpose of U.S. military involvement is to drive a wedge between the Arab and the European world and further slow down the creation of grand Euro-Arab economic alliance. Behind the veneer of American legalism, Benoist sees a push for world supremacy by a hegemon whose major objectives have always been the same. In a piece in the December 6, 1990, issue of *Le Monde*, published a month before the air bombing started, he enumerated American objectives as follows:

— To remedy its economic problems and to avert a recession by escaping into the logic of war.

— To implant itself permanently in the Gulf in order to control oil wells.

— To destroy a regional power in the Middle East, to the benefit of those who have been demanding its annihilation for months.

— To take advantage of the transformation of the Soviet Union into a "Western power," in order to convert the Security Council of the United Nations—already dominated by the Westerners—into an embryonic global government and a new source of international law.

— To set up a world order that would: a) marginalize the countries of the South; b) subordinate the political

sphere to the juridical sphere; c) foster in international law an ethics that would legitimize Western interests.

Similar views are shared by Robert Steuckers, a New Rightist who in a piece published in the November 1990 *Diorama Letterario* (Florence) analyzes the clash in the Gulf in terms of great geopolitical earthquakes. Once again a major maritime power is waging war against a continental actor: the Behemoth and Leviathan have locked their horns in the desert, as they did earlier in this century in the war over Europe. By largely subscribing to the ideas elaborated by prominent political thinkers such as Karl Haushofer and Jordis von Lohausen, Steuckers draws a parallel between Kuwait and Holland with their ports, on the one hand, and land-locked, peasant-minded Germany and Iraq on the other. In 1648 France and Sweden propped up the artificial Holland in order to prevent the Germans from coalescing into a single large nation-state; today, England and America are shoring up the estuary Kuwait against a continental country in quest of access to the sea. And just as the task of the Dutch mercantile elites consisted of choking Germany's seaborne aspirations, so is the purpose of Kuwaiti petro-monarchs to keep the English and American economy running full steam.

According to this theory of interdependence laid out by Steuckers, naval powers are in an eminent position to wage wars far from home. Their insular character combined with their great mobility, Steuckers alleges, necessitates a messianic foreign policy imbedded in a political theology of globalism. Unfortunately, global thinking results in global conflicts, which in turn run the risk of causing global wars. Steuckers writes that "the universalist ideology of the Americans, from Roosevelt onwards, has led to world wars and the globalization of horror, when instead, as common sense would suggest, war should be limited by all means! To limit deliberately one's own action to his continental sphere of influence (that of Europe to Europeans, that of America to Americans) could automatically localize war and prevent it from spreading to the entire world."

But in addition to its global dimension, the Gulf War has taken on a surreal aspect. In a February 4, 1991,

interview in *Der Spiegel*, the French cultural critic Jean Baudrillard, who could be counted as a disillusioned leftist and who is often quoted by New Rightists, argues that American political messianism has led to the unreality of nonstop TV bombardment superseding the objective world of bombed Iraqi targets. The war against Iraq, with its blown-up images of destroyed targets, is "pornographic," full of "fetal violence." "There is no need, literally, for this war," continues Baudrillard, because "the opponents are not on the same footing; they are not on the same turf of the same reality." Accordingly, whether America wins or loses the war is of little importance. In a surreal system unfolding itself in total media implosion, as Baudrillard sees it, wars can be won any way—vicariously, at request, *à la carte*—like in a movie theater. And even if this conflict turns sour, Hollywood will shortly begin to crank out "clean" and heroic combat scenes. Is not the Gulf War already fought like in a movie, with tele-guided decisions and Smart weapons? Meta-reality has swallowed reality.

Although European conservative criticism has not officially reached the centers of real power in Europe, it has already made an impact on the major currents of thought, dragging in its wake the firepower of similar leftist attacks. A close scrutiny of the European press indicates that the American role in the Middle East appears to have already broken up former political coteries and created new alliances that ten years ago would have been considered impossible. In the context of the ongoing intellectual restructuring, Benoist's remarks do not differ much in flavor or in substance from the prestigious left-leaning *Le Monde Diplomatique*, which in a February piece signed by Ignacio Ramonet blames Europe for abdicating to America, a country "whose demonstrated ignorance of the Middle East is scary." Such views would have certainly found a favorable response even among the very nationalistic and very conservative weekly *Deutsche National Zeitung*, which for months now, while seconding the views of the leftist chorus, has been comparing the bombing of Baghdad to the Allied fire-bombing of Berlin, Bremen, Breslau . . .

Historical parallels are being drawn

everywhere, by those who see in Saddam a reincarnated Hitler, and those who see the American bombing as high-tech colonialism or the fifth dimension of political surrealism. As others have suggested, the metaphor of the Gulf has already become a major ideological catalyst for new alliances among the traditionally frayed European intelligentsia. Indeed, a painful divorce is now under way between the proponents of the West and the adherents of a Europe from "Brest to Brest": those who are already eyeing the Berlin-Paris axis as the counterweight to the trilateral London-Washington-Tel Aviv. With geopolitical shifts caused by the German reunification, the centers of decision-making will undoubtedly move from Brussels to Berlin and Budapest, reviving old alliances while creating new worries for some.

The most painful yet fully predictable split is occurring among the leftist rank and file. Unlike conservatives, their lines of division are clearly ethnic and religious ones. In France, for instance, the famous SOS-Racisme, a socialist-inspired antiracist movement founded in 1984, is torn between those who support peace in the Mideast by resolving long-standing conflicts (such as the Palestinian question), and those who wish to punish Iraq by any means. Its chief figure, an eloquent black leader named Harlem Désir, has already collided with his intellectual superegos Marek Halter and Bernard Henry Lévy. Former bedfellows all across Europe are parting company, and scores of them are quickly changing their Moscow-Havana itinerary for a speedy trip to Washington via Tel Aviv.

The *perestroika* of European intellectuals will not, however, alleviate the plight of Arab immigrants in Europe. And beyond the rhetoric and the satire leveled at American decision-makers and their alleged ignorance of the Middle East, the problem of Arab immigration will remain. Today there are already ten million Muslims living in Europe—a sizable minority whose political weight and ability to shape European history can no longer be wished away. With their phenomenal birthrate, the Muslims in Europe are showing an old ethnic wisdom largely forgotten by Europeans: making babies is a continuation of politics by other means. Who needs, after all, Poitiers or

Constantinople, who should fear Charles Martel or Queen Isabel of Spain, when there are more pleasant ways of conducting high politics? Demographics is the realm in which all Third World countries are staking out their future. And one thing is already certain: the fallout of the Mideast crisis will dislocate thousands more from northern Africa, bringing pressure on European borders that will lead, according to reflexive behavior observed time and again in all multiracial countries, to more racism and possibly more violence. Thus the initially well-planned, aseptic, "soft porn" war in the Gulf, as described by Baudrillard, may turn into a hard-core dirty exodus with potentially damaging consequences for both the Arab and European communities. If one adds to it the anticipated bust-up in the Balkans, the consequences could mean disaster. Yugoslavia's four million Muslims, who unlike Slovenes, Serbs, or Croats lack their matrix state, may lend themselves tomorrow to all types of religious and political agitation, causing ferment Central Europe has not witnessed since Suleiman the Magnificent.

A relatively insulated maritime power, such as America is, will surely never experience the ripple effects felt on a continent where fifty ethnic destinies are squeezed between the neighboring Africa and Asia. Many conservatives in Europe are also worried that the aftermath of the war in the Gulf will trigger a new wave of terrorism that, short of reaching the American shores, will play itself out in Paris and Rome. It is no small wonder that many conservatives would have preferred Saddam's 19th province to the emir-lead Kuwait whose amassed wealth is squandered by a chosen few. In this context the peace mission to Baghdad of the avowedly anti-immigrationist Jean Marie Le Pen no longer looks bizarre. Similarly, the recent resignation of the French minister of defense, Jean Pierre Chevènement, is the consistent act of a man who, unlike his recycled fellow-travelers, has not changed his leftist credo since the May Days of his cobblestone street-fighting against the French bourgeois establishment.

But there are also less visible reasons for conservatives' irritation with U.S. policy in the Middle East; important reasons that, strangely enough, may

lead to a conservative and Muslim coalition. Admittedly, the end of the Cold War has deeply bruised the intellectual class, traditionally in search of certainties and systems. It has gobbled up their sense of historical time, leaving many European intellectuals adrift in the spiritual vacuum. Faced with apolitical apocalypse, the appeal of Islam, with its stress on rigor, valor, and virility, may be the right brew for those in search of a new destiny for Europe. Against the secular city that only bears the name of Christianity, Islam may offer for many an ideal of the sacred and a sense of community worth fighting and dying for. It must not be forgotten that some of the most eminent heavyweights among European conservatives, like Friedrich Nietzsche, Carl Schmitt, and Oswald Spengler, their rejection of monotheism notwithstanding, showed a great deal of sympathy for Islamic culture. The Westerners may ridicule Muslims, their garb, and their veiled women, but is not Islam just another spring from the same monotheist source? Its record of zeal and intolerance is no worse than that of other monotheist beliefs. To be sure, all three monotheisms, so far, have championed a very impressive hit parade of violence against each other, but also against the *other*. Did not President Bush, despite his secular weapons, seek solace from a prominent American religious figure on the eve of January 16, 1991?

In a time when East and West are brooding over the end of history, in an age when hard ideologies have given way to soft ideologies, for many European conservatives, Islam may furnish if not a religion, then at least a method. Should this happen, Europe, this old laboratory of ideas, may be jolted back to life and seize the fleeting opportunity for another bid for world leadership. And then, when political tornadoes start sweeping over Eurasia, we may witness all kinds of surprises. Old alliances may crumble, new friendships may be forged, and ploughs may again turn into swords.

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## A True Vindication of Edmund Burke

by Peter J. Stanlis

Mr. Conor Cruise O'Brien's "A Vindication of Edmund Burke," (*National Review*, December 17, 1990), contains many long established truths about Burke's politics — his consistency in principle, his remarkable insights and powers of prophesy, his strong critique of revolutionary ideology, and so forth. But amidst these trite truisms, which vindicate O'Brien's subject only to the uninitiated, he asserts some claims about the Enlightenment and Burke's religion and politics that are very dubious or simply false.

In 1975 the British historian John Lough warned against the loose use of "Enlightenment" as an abstract, all-inclusive category: "It is surely obvious that the greater the diversity of ideas which the term *Enlightenment* is stretched to cover, the less use it has as a scholarly tool. By the time the lowest common denominator can be discovered for ideas produced under such vastly different conditions, *Enlightenment* and *Lumières* become empty words." O'Brien would have done well to heed Lough's warning. Unless one equates the Enlightenment with the entire 18th century, it is meaningless rhetoric to call Burke "a child of the Enlightenment." O'Brien's indiscriminate inclusion of him under that term raises grave doubts that he understands either Burke or the enormously complex nature of that elusive category, and its vast range of interpretations.

O'Brien segments the Enlightenment arbitrarily, and identifies Burke with what he calls "the early, English or English-inspired phase of the Enlightenment. This was the Enlightenment of Locke . . . an Enlightenment that was compatible with a tolerant version of Christianity. This was Burke's Enlightenment." This is a colossal error. Burke always defended what he called the Christian commonwealth of Europe from its "enlightened" enemies — the materialists, atheists, deists, freethinkers, and epicureans who made their private "natural reason" the sole criterion for truth. In 1790 he charged that the primary