

U.S.: War to War Salesman

Fifth Estate Collective

1987

Political speculation concerning rapidly changing political events in a journal such as this which appears so infrequently puts the writer at a distinct disadvantage. Even by the time this paper is published, a new crisis may have been created and the current ones described herein discarded or resolved.

This is not an attempt to get us off the hook in advance for inaccurate predictions, but rather a realization that everything changes as the elements of official policy intersect differently with both its opposition and its own internal contradictions.

Perhaps our speculations will witness the opposite occurring (or maybe they will be perfectly correct), but in either event the descriptions of the fundamentals of U.S. economic and military policy remain accurate even as the details of their administration change.

How close is the U.S. to war? On one hand, the world remains poised as it has been on the brink of nuclear war ever since the United States-initiated atomic age began 42 years ago. On the other, the inter-imperial rivalry between East and West blocs creates a world constantly at war as the great powers and their vassals maneuver for world markets and relative geo-political-military advantage.

However, Americans usually refer to being at war only when U.S. troops are directly involved in combat for a sustained period. This, of course, ignores the U.S.'s numerous so-called low intensity covert actions which seem neither particularly low in intensity nor very covert to those suffering the ravages of the mercenaries the U.S. sponsors in Angola or Nicaragua for instance.

At the moment of this writing, there are two areas—the Persian Gulf and Central America—which hold the greatest potential for open hostilities involving the U.S. directly. Even the daily media hold powerful suggestions of what is in the wind. When maps begin to appear on the front pages of the daily papers, one can be assured that the generals are in the process of priming the muzzles. The decision to flag Kuwaiti oil tankers with the U.S. colors, for example, is seen almost universally as a prescription for conflict given the war raging in the region.

In Central America, Reagan's brutal contras, despite multi-million dollar funding and U.S. logistical support, have gotten nowhere militarily or politically towards the goal of gaining a base of support within Nicaragua during their much vaunted "Spring offensive." In El Salvador, the U.S. client government of President Napoleon Duarte has become more isolated and unpopular with all segments of Salvadoran society. At the same time, urban leftist and labor opposition has returned to almost the levels it had achieved prior to its decimation by U.S.-sponsored death squads in the early 1980s. And, despite record tonnage bombings of rebel civilian areas, the FMLN-FDR guerrillas retain their strongholds and base of popular support.

Long-range Goals of Empire

It is at moments such as this when the long-range goals of empire, the immediate needs of capital, and the crass and mundane considerations of politicians often become contradictory or even in conflict. Reagan sits as

the chairman of the executive apparatus for the empire and its world economy, yet the necessities of that role can conflict with his desire to assure himself a favorable “place in history.”

With the onset of Irangate, the President, more often than not, is portrayed as doddering with his administration wracked by corruption and scandal. One can almost assuredly expect a dramatic gesture on Reagan’s part to reverse his personal losses before his term is over.

The hope in liberal quarters has been that Reagan would attempt to leave his imprint on the Presidency by negotiating a nuclear arms reduction pact with the Soviet Union and exit the office with the image of peacemaker. Mikhail Gorbachev is desperate for such a treaty in order to demonstrate a major foreign policy success to his internal opposition in the Kremlin, to get his country off the treadmill of state armament expenditures which divert the Soviet economy from the production of consumer goods, and to remove Reagan’s finger from the hair-trigger missiles aimed at the Russian heartland.

Gorbachev and Soviet negotiators have compromised continually with U.S. arms demands which seem to be purposely designed by their American counterparts to insure a continuation of the nuclear arms race. However, Reagan may be left with no options other than to sign a treaty which goes against his right-wing and apocalyptic vision of Fortress America which eventually can fight and defeat international Communism. The resolution to this quandary will unravel depending upon how Reagan handles the coming crises.

U.S. Imperial Policy in Crisis

The Persian Gulf provocation—and what else can it be called—coupled with Reagan’s ominous remark that he will not leave the Nicaraguan “problem” to his successor, may be the way in which he wriggles out of an arms pact. If there is a crisis at either flashpoint, Reagan can cite the exigencies of war to postpone a treaty, or, in the case of Central America, point to the steely hand of the Soviets as an excuse to cut off the almost successful arms negotiations.

Reagan’s war vs. peace dilemma points up the world-wide crisis of U.S. imperial policy in general. To not crush the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran revolutions would be a severe blow, similar to the one it received in Indochina, to America’s four-decade old strategy of opposing all revolts against its imperial network of client states unless it controls the change such as in the Philippines.

However, the imperial planners are confronted by the so-called “Vietnam syndrome” in which the U.S. people continually oppose U.S. military adventures, particularly if they risk American casualties. This “problem” for the rulers sometimes is overcome by purposeful provocations such as the naval intrusion into Libyan waters last year, or by pure fabrication such as the endangered medical students story which justified the invasion of Grenada.

U.S. Lost Ally in Iran

In the Gulf region, it has been the long-range goal of the military strategists to bring Iran back within the Western orbit, but it is there that U.S. policy is most confused and confusing. The U.S. lost its strongest regional ally to the 1979 Islamic revolution, and with the Shah went not only its Persian Gulf guard dog, but its crucial spy station, located strategically on the Soviet border, as well. Although officially hostile to the government of Ayatollah Khomeini, the U.S. connection with the new Iranian regime began far in advance of the mid-’80s, a date which has surfaced during the continuing official whitewash of the Irangate exposures.

According to the July 7, 1987 issue of *The Nation*, the 1980 Republican campaign team was fearful of an election eve move which would free the American hostages held in Tehran and undercut their criticism of Carter’s timid handling of the affair. The late William Casey, who has conveniently arisen as the universal scapegoat for the Iran/contra debacle, initiated a so-called October Surprise Group whose task it was to head off the possibility of a pre-election release. Republican campaign officials, including Richard Allen, met and negotiated directly with two powerful ayatollahs and promised them American arms in exchange for holding the hostages until after the election.

This secret arrangement not only assured Reagan's election, but also had several other important consequences. Arming Iran meant the prolongation of the conflict between Iraq and Iran which weakens both thus limiting the possibility of either attacking U.S. client states in the region. It also creates a dependency of Iran on U.S. weapons and replacement parts, lessening the possibility of them turning to the Soviets for arms.

What a U.S. response to a real or fabricated Iranian attack on the Kuwaiti ships would do to this policy is unknown, but the Reaganites seem willing to risk it. After the exultation in the media of the President as a tough war leader following the bullying attacks on Libya and Grenada, his advisers may think the resultant damage done to the empire's longer range goals is worth the increased gain they envision in his popularity.

Role of the Military

Personal prestige, historical considerations and the upcoming elections aside, the planners still remain loyal to the old axiom, "war is the health of the nation," both for its obvious function to repress recalcitrant rebels or nations, and for its centrality to the U.S. economy through massive state arms expenditures.

The commitment of the American ruling class to a permanent war economy—a garrison state—has meant that its political and financial apparatuses have never seriously considered nuclear arms reductions. Rather, they have used each new arms pact as the signal for a new phase of weapons development. The U.S. currently seeks nuclear arms superiority through a first-strike capability based upon the trillion dollar funded Star Wars program which, while juicing the economy, would allow the U.S. to maintain its political and military hegemony over the Soviet Union.

This means that the rulers fear steps away from war in much the same manner ordinary people fear steps toward war. Peace will destroy the grotesque world of the stockholder, the military planner and the politician in the same way war will shatter ours. This dichotomy furthers the imperial dilemma.

Even at the height of the Reagan/Rambo era there was a public resistance to be completely manipulated by the war psychosis generated through the cultural machine. Now with the Reagan regime in public disarray, the population's willingness to support the empire's military necessities is diminishing all the more. ("Public" disarray should be stressed because the secret government which runs political and military policy inside the White House, State Department and Pentagon remains intact and is operating as it always has—totally insulated from public or Congressional pressures.)

New Possibilities

In many quarters, the government is once again held in suspicion, the Reagan era as a media construct seems at an end, and there is a generalized disquiet about the future. Where people go from here is a politically open question, but it is at junctures such as this where opportunities for posing anti-statist and anti-authoritarian ideas become more possible.

The U.S. military should be a prime target to approach. At this time, there is not a patriotic army. Young men and women join because they are forced to for reasons of poverty, the promise of training and money for school, or lack of immediate employment. Very few are in uniform with dreams of parachuting into Managua in the first assault wave.

The article reprinted here from the April 1–7, 1971 *Fifth Estate* issue demonstrates the power of a mutinous army. Ultimately, it is what the rulers fear the most, for without their repressive mechanism, they are powerless. Military resistance to imperial wars accompanied by a large scale refusal on the part of young men to sign for draft registration would be a clear signal to the generals and the politicians that this generation cannot be counted on to fight wars to defend capital.

Also, a strong anti-authoritarian/antimilitarist presence at the countless antiwar actions going on across the country or the initiation of independent projects is an important way to raise these themes. We should be aware that the empire is posed to strike, and every response we are capable of should be launched in anticipation.

DON'T REGISTER! DON'T FIGHT!

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Fifth Estate #326, Summer, 1987

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