



John C. Quinn
Editor

John Seigenthaler
Editorial Director

OPINION

The Debate: DANGER IN THE GULF

Today's debate includes our view that the USA must work with the U.N. and other nations to halt the Iran-Iraq war, opposing views from the District of Columbia and Virginia, other views from California, and voices from across the USA.

This is no time to pull out of gulf

The White House made official Wednesday what the world already knew. The growing U.S. force in the Persian Gulf is in "imminent danger." Military personnel in the area will now be paid an extra \$110 a month.

That force is reaching massive proportions. There are almost 10,000 sailors aboard 40 ships. They face danger from mines, missiles, and maniacs from Iran. Their very presence makes too real the threat of war.

But despite that threat, now is not the time for us to throw our engines in reverse and pull out. Vacillating U.S. policy has already undermined our interests in the region.

It is the time to define those interests and to decide how to pursue them.

We must work with other countries, particularly through the United Nations, to reduce Iran's threat to its neighbors, whose oil is vital to the Western democracies. That means bringing an end to the Iran-Iraq war, which for seven years has threatened regional stability. At the same time, we must avoid being drawn into war ourselves.

Fortunately, there are growing signs that other nations share those goals.

Saudi Arabia, the key oil state, has an overwhelming Islamic population and fears the spread of fundamentalist revolution from Iran. Throughout the war, it has tried to appease Iran, but lately the Saudis have openly accused Iran of fomenting revolution. They have also quietly begun to allow refueling of U.S. planes on Saudi territory.

Kuwait, long wary of Iran for the same reasons, precipitated the U.S. buildup by asking us to reflag its tankers.

Iraq, with a fraction of Iran's population, fears it will lose the war. It accepted a U.N. cease-fire proposal.

Arab League nations threatened this week to break relations with Iran unless it accepts a cease-fire.

Western Europe, while reluctant to join the U.S. military effort, has a vital interest in stability. It is dependent on Mideast oil. Britain and France have long patrolled the gulf on their own, and they are sending more minesweepers. There are signs other nations may follow.

Even the Soviets share some of our interests, as President Reagan pointed out Wednesday. Most of the Soviet population near Iran is Moslem, so fundamentalist revolution promises nothing but trouble. That's why the Soviets, too, endorsed the U.N. cease-fire proposal.

"USA TODAY hopes to serve as a forum for better understanding and unity to help make the USA truly one nation."

—Allen H. Neuharth
Chairman and Founder
Sept. 15, 1982

JAMES BOVARD

An opposing view

Pull the U.S. fleet out of the gulf now

WASHINGTON — If sailing our fleet into the Persian Gulf was stupid, keeping it there is positively idiotic. Just because we are a superpower does not mean that we must perpetuate our mistakes.

Jumping into the middle of the Iran-Iraq war is just one more example of our government's habit of wandering into a barroom brawl and trying to fight while carefully holding one pinky up in the air.

Putting U.S. flags on Kuwaiti oil tankers makes about as much sense as making Poland our 51st state. This whole scheme is reminiscent of the great victory of our Marines in Beirut in 1983.

In Beirut, having our Marines standing tall — albeit with unloaded guns and a dozen other restrictions on their self-defense — was supposed to bring peace to Lebanon. As long as only a few were killed each week, the absurdity was tolerable. But, after a truck bomb blew up the Marine barracks and killed more than 200 of them, the USA withdrew.

Kuwait is one of the richest nations in the world and could afford to buy the Seventh Fleet and provide its own protection. This is like the government providing free limo service to every millionaire in New York.

Why intervene in a fight between two anti-U.S. governments? As one Washington foreign-policy expert said, "The ideal situation for Americans would be for the last Iraqi to kill the last Iranian."

If the reflagging is a "success," we have spent several hundred million dollars (bare

James Bovard is a free-lance writer.

minimum) in order to bolster Kuwaiti oil profits. And if the reflagging is a failure, we end up in a pointless war with a nation that just bought many nice U.S. missiles.

If we fight Iran and win, the Iranians will go running to the Soviets — and Soviet influence in the Persian Gulf will soar. And if we lose... we lose.

It is said that if we leave the gulf without blowing up a few Iranians, Mideast governments will not think well of us. Every government in the Mideast has frequently disregarded or subverted U.S. interests. Why should we sacrifice our vital interests for their erratic opinions?

Iran is more of a pesky mosquito than a vital threat to the USA. If the Iranians actually shut down the Strait of Hormuz, then the USA and other Western powers can conduct a surgical bombing run. Until then, the best thing to do is to let Iran and Iraq continue to reap the rewards of their own knavishness.

The key question is: How does this escapade affect our ability for national defense? The pre-eminent threat to national security continues to be the Soviet Union. Would getting enmired in a conflict with millions of religious fanatics increase or decrease the Pentagon's ability to defend against a Soviet attack?

This is not our war, and there is no profit in U.S. intervention. The U.S. fleet should declare victory and withdraw.

Iran, gripped by religious fervor, won't shift course easily. It believes in a divine mission to spread fundamentalism and drive Western influence from the region. Our challenge is to build a consensus to overcome that fanaticism.

The U.N. offers the greatest promise for that. It has already achieved some level of success by developing a cease-fire plan acceptable to all except Iran. A visit to the region by the secretary general might elevate the effort further. Bilateral discussions offer additional opportunities.

Over the long haul, only a worldwide effort will stave off turmoil that threatens the gulf. Ten thousand of our sailors are in imminent danger. So is the world.