

Reinforcement Drilling For Star Challengers

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Reflections on the Gulf War

[1] The Gulf conflict was not the first war in which human rights were used as a cover for less honourable motives. Yet, the belief that the war was about human rights provided an honest justification for wanting Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait and preferably from Iraq too. The obvious truth that the conflict was about oil and imperialism did not mean that loftier ideals could not catch a ride as well.

[2] But any fantasies that the US was about to use its superpower status to act as a guarantor of human rights were swiftly dashed. High up on the roster of shame comes Washington's failure to stop the Kuwaitis deporting all the country's Palestinian residents – who were assumed collectively to have been supporters of Saddam. Indeed, the contrast between Washington's inertia in Kuwait and its recent protests to Israel about the deportation of Palestinians speaks for itself. And the incredible number of promises that the US had to make in order to get international backing for the US-led *Operation Desert Storm* arguably leaves human rights more impaired than before the conflict.

[3] Going to war turned out (unsurprisingly) to have been an inefficient way of upholding human rights. The other reason for going to war – the dismantling of Iraq's 'offensive capability' – was also

undermined by the outcome. True, Iraq is in poor shape to mount another invasion, but the price of a weakened Iraq has been a greatly strengthened Iran and Syria. The global arms trade has not been diminished by the war – on the contrary, it has been given a shot in the arm.

[4] In the field of arms control, part of the answer must be the strengthening of verification procedures, carried out by the United Nations. Any non-proliferation treaty limiting the production of weapons should allow for unannounced auditing. But there is no reason why verification should not extend into other fields too. Techniques already developed for weapons inspection should be transferred to other areas such as the environment.

[5] Human rights, too, ought to be subject to far greater verification. The UN is the most appropriate forum for new verification procedures to be developed. The Gulf War was hailed as a significant step forward for the UN. In reality it was nothing of the sort. The hijacking of the organization by the US, in order to lend the cloak of human rights legitimacy to a military adventure, reduced its credibility and left its staff demoralized. A more vigorous and independent system of monitoring human rights might help prevent it being similarly misused again.