

# From Military to Political Conflict : How the East was Won

West Asia Crises and the Dilemma for Marxists.  
By Qazi Malek.  
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Reviewed by Sabir Mustafa

## BOOK REVIEW



The East-West conflict, which began life as a political one in 1917, is back to its original form, the author con-

tends, with immediate benefit to the liberal-democratic model of the West. Moscow's position in the world in the '60s and '70s derived its strength mainly from its projection of Marxism as an ideology for revolutionary change, and the supposed prowess of its military forces. The dramatic decline of the Soviet economy through the '80s robbed socialism of much of its appeal, while the West Asia crisis of 1990 left the West in an unchallengeable position.

The dilemma Malek tried to analyse turned out to be not so much an ideological one for Marxists, as for power-players of the modern Soviet state. But the two issues have been so inextricably inter-linked in the post-World War II era, that the end of the East-West military confrontation has irresistibly

brought about a triumph for Western liberalism. Throughout this historical and contemporary analysis, the author seeks to hold the reader's attention through the speed and incisiveness of the narrative. Unfortunately, poor type-setting, lack of proper proof-reading, and frequently erroneous use of the English language itself, work to make the otherwise concise and non-sensational book a rather laboured reading. Eight tables listing various economic and political data in the appendices would have been most useful had they not been so woefully out of date, as was indeed the very peg of the book, which was obviously written even before bombs had begun to fall on Baghdad.

Since then, of course, Iraq had been routed, and the Kurds had once again become the focus of international attention by their ill-fated uprising against Baghdad which had brought Western forces into northern Iraq. All these merely went to re-emphasise America's ability to exploit a given situation in the region, while Moscow could only cast melancholy glances across the Caucasus mountains.

But despite these shortcomings, the book remains a most useful guide to East West relations and power-politics in West Asia, particularly for students of international affairs. In order to understand only big powers behave the way they do, and the enormous influence political ideology has cast over the conduct of economic and military policies.

the deployment of US and other Western forces in the same country in 1983, on the other. The Soviet Union's inability to act effectively on behalf of its Arab allies increasingly weakened its claim to be a legitimate player in the region.

In a fast-moving narrative, Qazi Malek paints the picture of the decline of Soviet power, and with it the world socialist movement, on a broad canvas. Delving deep into contemporary history of the Middle East and other crucial areas of the world, the author exposes how the Soviet Union, lacking America's industrial and economic might, slid down the path of bankruptcy while trying to match the military and space threat posed by the West.

QAZI Malek's book is a bit of a misnomer to begin with, since he uses the Iraq-Kuwait crisis merely as a peg on which to hang his broader, East-West coat. But this is not to say his peg is an inappropriate one. Far from it. The West Asia crisis of 1990-91, perhaps more than any other event since the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, dramatically exposed the bankruptcy of Soviet power in the face of a resurgent America.

The Middle East has never been a happy hunting ground for the Soviets, and the author's analysis of the causes and consequences of Soviet failure in the region successfully sheds some badly-needed light on Moscow's inability to respond to, or even influence the course of, the massive US intervention following Iraq's August 2 invasion of Kuwait last year. By contrast, United States' posture is portrayed by the author as an assertive one, with a clear geo-political design and a willingness to act quickly to counteract the habitually treacherous and perennially shifting patterns of West Asian politics. While Washington bounced back from the fall of the Pahlavi dynasty in Iran by rapidly increasing political and military interactions with Egypt and Saudi Arabia, thereby ensuring the safety of oil routes out of the Persian Gulf, Moscow never quite managed to recover from the severe blows dealt by Israel in 1982 through its destruction of Syrian forces in the Lebanon on the one hand, and

# Britain Ready to Scrap New Hong Kong Airport

Britain seems prepared to scrap the massive Hong Kong airport project altogether rather than sink deeper into a diplomatic quagmire with China. Old studies for the expansion of the existing Kai Tak airport are being dusted down. But this is not the answer, since it is in a congested area. And actually the Chinese do not want to see the new airport project shelved. by Frances Kelly

THE plan for an expensive new airport for Hong Kong has become a battle between Britain and China for control of the territory.

The airport was first touted as Britain's parting gift to its colony, which is due to come under Chinese control in 1997. With a \$16.3 billion price tag it could have been the most expensive present in the world.

Described as the most ambitious airport and port development project ever, it has poisoned relations between Britain and China, sent Hong Kong's stock market tumbling, fuelled fears that Beijing may not wait until 1997 to try to rule the colony, and threatens to undermine one of Asia's most buoyant economies.

Now Britain is prepared to scrap the project altogether

Douglas Hurd left Beijing saying he was confident an agreement could be worked out, but not at the expense of surrendering Hong Kong's autonomy.

He said: "It is very important that the Hong Kong government retain the authority and the capability to take decisions because only in that way can projects like the airport be carried out effectively, efficiently and economically."

Hopes for the airport have deteriorated badly since then. Local newspapers display headlines like "Anatomy of a Blunder", "Puppet of Beijing Warning", and "Joint Declaration Reduced to a Sick Joke". Other articles claim that Britain will shelve the project rather than bow to China's demands.

So what is the Chinese position? To being with, Beijing

of the poorest run airports and one of the worst aviation safety records in the world.

Responding to the leak, Acting Financial Secretary Hamish Macleod said airport construction, far from draining Hong Kong's treasury, would strengthen the colony's economy, stimulate industrial growth and generate new government revenues.

China has also asked to be represented on a new airport authority that will oversee construction — if it ever gets off the ground.

What has irked Britain most, however, is China's demand of veto power on all major decisions concerning Hong Kong that straddle 1997.

It is this demand that has turned the airport disagreement into a question of who controls Hong Kong.

Said Legislative councillor Martin Lee, chairman of the United Democrats of Hong Kong: "If the British government simply accepted the demands of China, it would not be able to continue its effective rule over Hong Kong's internal affairs."

He warned that it would be unwise to compromise Hong Kong autonomy, adding that it would be a "naive and forlorn hope" not to expect further Chinese interference in the future.

At an emergency meeting of Hong Kong's Executive Council councillors ruled out the feasibility of proceeding with the airport without Chinese full approval.

Hong Kong had hoped to raise at least 25 per cent of the cost of the project from the private sector. Without China's backing, it concedes it could not attract investors.

Each setback to the airport talks has seen stock market prices plummet. Recent swings have knocked three percentage points off all Hong Kong stocks in just one day.

Hong Kong has begun dusting down old studies of ways to expand Kai Tak airport, such as lifting an overnight curfew on landings, giving priority to wide-bodied jets and building a second runway.

Very expansion would be very limited, since Kai Tak is located in urban Kowloon and already 350,000 people live under flight paths and around the airport.

China, however, wants a new airport at Chep Lap Kok. On April 23 it said a "highly efficient" new airport would be built there if the current project falls through.

Chen Zou'er, one of China's airport negotiators and a deputy director of the State Council's Hong Kong and Macau Affairs office, said: "If the British Hong Kong authorities shelve the airport project after earlier claiming they would build it, they would be writing a disgraceful chapter for the second half of the transitional period. We do not wish to see the project shelved." — GEMINI NEWS

## CONVERSATION

From preceding page such as irrigation, fertilisers etc. There is a consensus that if you introduce a new technology, in order to encourage people to use the technology or product, you may need subsidy in the beginning. But at a certain stage after you get going, the consensus is that the subsidy is no longer needed.

DS: Whose consensus? NI: Of the international community, including developing countries. Many developing countries have found that you need the initial period of subsidy after the introduction of a new technology, but not thereafter. But again, for certain disadvantaged regions where transportation cost is very high, you may need some subsidised distribution, but these are highly special cases. But here in Bangladesh, subsidies on agricultural inputs such as urea fertiliser have been eliminated.

DS: Partly because we produce so much of urea, if we didn't perhaps subsidies would have been there... NI: There is another point here though. Sometimes what happens is that we no longer import these inputs, we produce them at home. If the cost of production at home is much higher than the world market, then we subsidise the industry, not the farmer. Because, that industry is non-competitive, producing at a high cost, so if I import from abroad I can import at a lower price, but I have to use my domestic output, so I buy at a higher price and I subsidise it. I end up subsidising the industry.

DS: The World Bank is putting a lot of pressure on developing countries to open up their economies, their trade policies, and liberalise. And I think you were hinting at that, that we should go over to what is called "comparative advantage," and import everything that we do not produce competitively... NI: Yes, yes, but Bangladesh has — at least on paper, I don't know about the actual implementation — liberalised to a considerable extent.

DS: That is the issue. Do you think liberalisation is a good policy for a developing country, or should it be selectively protective? NI: Protectionism is not totally eliminated under liberalisation. The problem is how do you ensure temporary protectionism. The problem is once you give protection it becomes permanent. The ease for temporary protectionism is admitted — the standard infant industry argument, that if you have an infant industry you must nurse it. The question is actual implementation, because once you get into it, you never get out of it. So what do you do about it? This remains the perennial problem.

DS: But that is the universal experience, that usually protectionism becomes a problem NI: Not successful countries have been able to reduce it. Korea reduced it. Korea started with high import substitution and protectionism, and over time reduced it. Taiwan didn't have much to begin with. And now, Latin American countries are drastically reducing protectionism, drastically. Mexico has gone overboard, they are all doing it. Eastern European countries

are doing it. It would involve tremendous economic readjustment within the country. And that's why it's a painful process.

DS: There was a story some time back about India having mortgaged 20 tons of gold in order to meet its foreign exchange requirements. One of the factors about our import liberalisation policy will be the strength of our foreign exchange reserves, because very few countries are giving you anything in barter so you have to spend money. Now, if a country economically as strong, compared to us, as India has to mortgage 20 tons of gold in order to replenish its foreign currency reserves, you can imagine how critical our position can be if we go all the way.

NI: You see, the theory is that when you liberalise, you should increase your exports as well, right? Korea did go through the process. They started with import substitution industrialisation just like any other developing country, but soon they moved on to export promotion, sometimes with heavy subsidies, and then followed by import liberalisation. It was a sequence, and the Koreans did move from one to the other. But in many countries in South Asia, we did not move from one to the



IN LIMBO: Aday goes waste for the lone crow that gets the damper from incessant rain. — Star photo by Mohsin

other. So you start with import substitution — because you have to, it is the first step anywhere, historically or contemporary — but then you have to move on to the next stage. If you don't move on, you are stuck.

DS: Is that what happened to Bangladesh? That we haven't moved on to the export-promotion stage?

NI: That is correct, almost all South Asian countries are like that. You see what we have done is we have discriminated against exports in favour of import substitution. The idea is that we should not discriminate against exports in favour of import substitution. We should allow both. If you discriminate, then you are stuck with this one and exports suffer.

You have to move quickly as

opportunities develop. That is where economic management becomes critical, that is why we come back to the governance issue. Government has to be extremely efficient, and whatever policies you formulate they have to be implemented well, and have to be responsive to the changes and signals in the world market with the ability to respond quickly. So, economic management is the crux of the matter.

DS: Now, you have gained a lot of experience at the UN and international circles. Looking back, what have you gained in terms of intellectual satisfaction?

NI: I have worked for national universities, national governments, international organisations and back again at international research. Now, as

you move around these different kinds of assignments, you don't feel that definite, that positive about questions and answers. When you are young, you feel definite about answers to questions. But as you grow old, as you see different situations nationally and internationally, you don't feel that confident that you know the answer. Simple questions are immeasurably complicated, and the answers are not that clear. When you come to these international negotiations, there are tremendous amount of grey areas. We approach the truth and the right answer, but we never quite make it, because the situation changes all the time. So this supreme confidence is the mark of youth, not of old age.

DS—Thank You, Dr Islam

## Project destined to be stillborn?



rather than sink deeper into a diplomatic quagmire.

An underlying irony of this dispute is that both sides actually want the airport — it is just that China has deep reservations about aspects of the project.

Britain has been trying for a year to win Chinese approval for the scheme which would see a new twin-runway airport built on reclaimed land at Chep Lap Kok on Lantau island.

The plan also calls for construction of a suspension bridge to link the new airport to the mainland, two new towns to house 260,000 people, container port facilities, a rail link, a six-lane highway and a cross-harbour tunnel.

No one disputes that Hong Kong needs a new airport to replace the overburdened Kai Tak. That is where agreement ends. Talks between Britain and China have all ended in deadlock. In April, British Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary

was not consulted before Hong Kong Governor Sir David Wilson announced the airport plans in October 1989, and they were not happy about it.

Secondly, the Chinese fear that the project will drain the colony's treasury. Details of the hand-over negotiations are secret, but Beijing is said to have demanded that at least \$3.2 billion be left in the coffers when Hong Kong becomes part of China at midnight on June 30, 1997.

These fears are not without foundation, it would seem. On April 23, Hong Kong legislative councillor Kingsley Sit Ho-yan leaked a government report which suggested that the proposed airport would run the colony's \$9.4 billion reserves down to only \$64 million.

China claims it has presented Britain with an airport plan that would not deplete Hong Kong's fiscal reserves. But many here balk at the thought of taking advice from the mainland which has some

## WRITE TO MITA

Dear Mita  
I am twenty years old. I am having a serious problem. I am in love with a girl, living in the same flat that live. She is one year junior to me. I have indirectly come to know from her that she thinks of me just as a friend. But I am seriously in love with her. In this situation, tell me how can I make her fall in love. Actually what should I do now? I really need your advice.

Imran, Dhaka.

Dear Imran,  
Getting attracted to a member of the opposite sex is not unusual at your age, but it is difficult to know whether this is love or infatuation. Ask yourself the reason for falling in love with her. What is your attraction based on? If you are satisfied by the answers than try to get to know her socially. Discover her as a person, her likes, dislikes, tastes etc. Try to develop a friendship. You will soon know her feelings for you, once you get better acquainted. There is really no formula for making anyone fall in love. You will have to endeavor yourself to her so that gradually the friendship she feels for you turns to love.

Salma, Dhaka.

Dear Salma,  
The doctor in our team says: The cause and exact nature of this syndrome is unknown. This only happens in babies under 3 months. Some kind of digestive difficulty causes extreme discomfort and both parents and doctors fail to relieve the baby's distress. It usually starts at the same time every night. These babies are not unhealthy in any other way. The only consolation is that it rarely lasts for more than 6-8 weeks. Please look after your health and try to spend some time away from the baby and spend it in doing things you particularly enjoy.

Salma, Dhaka.

Dear Mita,  
The idea of a 60-year-old man having an affair may sound crazy to some but what would happen if a 60-year-old woman did the same thing? We don't apply the same standard to men and women even at that age. Why is it that men can hope to enjoy life even after their prime while women have to give up all such hope once they are divorced or widowed? I know, because I am such a woman.

Salma, Dhaka.

Dear Salma,  
While it is true that our society applies double standards for men and women, things are changing. Widowed and divorced women are no longer leading the pitiful existence that they did 50 years ago. With education there is a growing

awareness that these women can still lead meaningful lives and contribute to society. Though it is not an easy task to break years of superstition, ignorance and custom, still we are making progress. I personally know of women in their early fifties who remarried and are happy. As I had written earlier, developing your potential and becoming independent both financially and psychologically is your best bet.

Dear Mita,  
The letter from the 60 year-old gentleman accused of having an affair was shocking to some and ridiculous to others. But I think a man of that age can still feel young and fall in love. What is so ridiculous about it? Why are people so interfering? People both young and old should be allowed to do what they want. Our society is full of hypocrisy. If a person does things openly he is blamed but if he does it secretly no one minds.

Dear Mr. Ali  
Yes, there are hypocrites in our society, even then we all have to live by some norms. It is unseemly for a 60-yr-old man with a wife, children and may be grand children to have an affair. However, if a person is a widower or a divorcee then society does not grudge him the chance to start a new life.

Amjad Ali, Dhaka

## WRITE TO MITA

Run by a trained and experienced Family and Marriage counsellor, assisted by a professional team of doctor, psychologist and lawyer, this column will answer questions relating to family, marriage, health, family laws, and social and interpersonal relationships. Please address letters to Mita, The Daily Star, GPO Box 3257 or to 28/1, Toynbee Circular Road, Motijheel, Dhaka-1000.