

THE MIDDLE EAST

In an unguarded moment, shortly after the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York City, the President of the United States declared that his country was launching a “crusade” against terrorism. In the light of the historical reality of the Crusades, the word was clearly not the best choice for a politician engaged in forging an alliance, among others, with the world’s Muslim countries. The term was hastily withdrawn and replaced by the more neutral word “campaign”.

From another point of view, however, the word was well chosen as an expression of the historical reality as it has in fact existed since the time of the Prophet Muhammad and as it still exists today. In fact, religious and other ideologies have always played an important role in events as they have unfolded throughout human history and there is an element of the crusade in all of them. This is certainly true in the case of the Middle East. It certainly underlies the continuing conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbours. And for that reason religion will make a convenient starting point for today’s discussion of that fascinating region of the world.

RELIGION

The Middle East is the cradle of Islam. More specifically the Islamic religion came into being on the western margins of the Arabian Peninsula that forms part of present-day Saudi Arabia. We are all probably aware that, apart from its more commonplace meaning of a collective endeavour aimed in a particular direction, Crusade is the name given to a series of attempts by the forces of Christendom to liberate the holy city of Jerusalem from the so-called infidel. This is one excellent example of the way different people adopt different perceptions of the same set of circumstances depending precisely upon their respective religious ideologies. Indeed the Muslims for their part had deliberately chosen Jerusalem, which they referred to as Al Quds, to become the site of the first great Islamic shrine. The place chosen by Abd al-Malik, fifth caliph of the Umayyad dynasty, who reigned from 685 to 705 of the Christian era, was Temple Mount and this was the exact spot where, according to rabbinic tradition, Abraham had prepared to sacrifice his son and on which the Ark of the Temple had rested. It was precisely here that Abd al-Malik built the Dome of the Rock, as the new Islamic shrine was and is called in English. The choice was not therefore by any means an accidental one. On the contrary, it had the clear polemical purpose of correcting the errors the Jews and the Christians had fallen into. It was intended as a symbolic statement that Islam had come to supersede and complete the teachings of the earlier prophets.

The interior decoration of the Dome of the Rock makes this polemical purpose absolutely clear. The walls are decorated with inscriptions of verses from the Koran, one of which reads as follows:

God is one, without partner, without companion.

This is an explicit rejection of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

The point here however is not to relate the entire history of Islam from the times of the Prophet, through the successive dynasties of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, the Umayyad, the Abbasids, the Seljuk Turks, the Ottomans and so on, to the present day. The purpose is rather to show the persistence of the influence of religious ideologies throughout history and down to the present day. It is thus no accident that one of the most burning and apparently insoluble issues in the Middle East today is the conflict between Israel and the rest of the Arab world, with Palestine in the forefront. The deep religious roots of this conflict are only too obvious. We shall have more to say about this conflict later.

At the same time, it would be quite incorrect to suppose that Islam is one single and undivided faith. This approach is still sometimes the rather naïve approach of people outside the Middle East in the world of Christianity among others. Such an attitude is however grossly oversimplified and it is just as mistaken to imagine that everyone in the Islamic world is driven by the same religion, as it would be to assume that everyone in the so-called Christian world belongs to the same sect and is filled with an equal degree of religious devotion.

The real situation is more complex. In the first place, the Muslim world is split into two major branches, the Sunnites who constitute the vast majority and the Shi'ites who are a powerful minority. The origin of this split can be traced back to a very early moment in the spread of Islam, namely the early years of the Abbasid caliphate, when the Abbasids had to defend their legitimacy as rulers against a group, known as the Shi'ites, the descendants of Ali, who believed that the only rightful line of descent was through the family of the Prophet himself. The Sunni on the other hand believed that the Koran and the habitual behaviour of the Prophet were enough for a proper interpretation of Islam.

In addition to these major divisions into the Sunnite and the Shi'ite sects, there are many other groups and religions alive and active in various parts of the Middle East, including Kurds, Armenians, Druses, Alawites (which is the sect of the ruling Ba'athist government in Syria) and Copts.

OIL

It is of course open to debate whether religion has been more important than oil in the more recent history of the Middle East. The first drilling for oil took place as early as 1842 in the Aspheron peninsula then ruled by Russia. Subsequently, in the first part of the twentieth century, the oil of the Middle East was exploited by mainly British, French, Dutch and American concessionary companies operating under royalty arrangements with Middle Eastern governments. Between 1918 and 1934 an oil pipeline had already been built from Iraq across what was then Transjordan and Palestine to the port of Haifa situated on the Mediterranean coast. However, at this time the consumption of oil in Europe was still relatively small. It was not until the 1950s that major new discoveries of oil were made. It is estimated that the Middle East possesses more than two-thirds of the world's oil reserves and by 1970 was producing more than one-third of the world's total output of oil.

Within the Middle East the effect of the exploitation of oil has been uneven. Though deposits of oil exist in some Middle Eastern countries and not in others, this distinction was mitigated to the extent that the non-oil-producing countries benefited from loans, grants and investments from the oil-producing countries. This transfer of wealth from oil producing to non-oil-producing countries occurred through the establishment of special funds for that purpose, such as the organization of Arab oil-exporting countries, OAPEC, an organization created by OPEC, the organization of oil-exporting countries or the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development. At the same time, however, other factors meant that the increased revenue from oil was not evenly spread throughout the population. The new wealth tended to remain in the hands of the upper echelons of society – the ruling elites, army officers, technicians and highly skilled workers – while those at the lower end of the scale – small business people and lower level employees – were left out.

Increased government revenues were spent first and foremost on armaments, purchased mainly from the United States and Western Europe. The other major areas of economic expansion were government service and the consumer industries. By contrast, little investment was made in heavy industry, the principle exceptions being: Saudi Arabia, which built two large complexes on the Red Sea; and Algeria under the leadership of Boumediene.

Income remitted by migrant workers employed in the oil-rich countries of the Middle East of the world made a significant contribution, amounting to no less than \$5 billion a year at the end of the 1970s.

It is true that the existence of immense deposits of oil in the Middle East has given the countries of the region powerful leverage in the world as a whole and in relation to the United States and Western Europe in particular. Around 1981, however, oil prices reached their peak and thereafter declined quite rapidly. There were several main reasons for this: excess production; more careful use of energy in the industrialized countries and the failure of OPEC to maintain a united front. Some commentators would now go so far as to say that reliance on the oil economy is a dangerous thing on the part of those in the Middle East that rely on the export of oil. There is oil in other parts of the world apart from the Middle East and there are also other sources of energy apart from oil.

At the same time, it is worth noting that at the present time more than 50% of the oil consumed by the United States originates in the Middle East. Nor is there any obvious evidence of an attempt to replace oil by some other so-called renewable source of energy, such as wind power, or non-renewable energy, such as natural gas, on any economically significant scale.

The importance of oil is underscored by the issue of economic sanctions imposed by the United States against three countries in the Middle East region. The following statement in this regard is published by the American Petroleum Institute (API).

“Economic sanctions against three major oil producers—Iran, Iraq, and Libya, are being reviewed in the context of US energy policy. This study argues that these sanctions to date have both failed to achieve their intended goals and instead have produced unintended and perverse consequences. Because of expected changes in world oil markets, continuation of such policies is likely to be even more prone to perverse consequences in the future. Even if they worked as intended, such policies could raise worldwide oil prices by as much as 25%, offsetting much or all of any revenue loss to the target countries due to reduced output, while costing consumers more than \$160 billion annually in increased oil prices and reducing world GDP by more than \$100 billion annually”

The importance of the oil economy can lead to interesting, and perhaps extreme, interpretations of current events in the Middle East. Here is one example of mistrust of US foreign policy in relation to the Middle East.. A newspaper in Bahrain has claimed that “Strategic oil interests in the energy-rich Caspian basin may be the real reason for current US-led military strikes on Afghanistan.” Such mistrust of US foreign policy is perhaps understandable, when one remembers US involvement - sometimes covert - in Chile, Colombia, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Iraq, Korea, or Vietnam, for example.

WHERE IS THE MIDDLE EAST?

So far we have been speaking about the Middle East, as if it was a clear concept. To some extent this is justified. But in fact this is not entirely true. So this is perhaps an appropriate moment to say something about the definition of the term “the Middle East”. We are more or less correct in situating the region approximately at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. And in the case of many countries we can without hesitation state that they do belong in the Middle East. The list might be as follows:

- Bahrain
- Egypt
- Iran
- Iraq
- Israel
- Jordan
- Kuwait
- Lebanon
- Oman
- Qatar
- Saudi Arabia
- Sudan
- Syria
- United Arab Emirates
- Yemen

On closer inspection we find that, although the essential core of the Middle East is clear, there are a number of countries that seem to occupy a kind of nether world; some include them within the Middle East region, whereas others do not. It appears, for some at least, that we need to extend the region far to the west along the northern coast of the African continent to include:

Libya
Algeria
Tunisia and
Morocco

There are cogent enough reasons for making this extension. And perhaps it should even go as far as Mauritania.

And it also seems as if we need to include some other major countries, such as Turkey (which occupies a rather singular position within the region), Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Some writers attempt to stretch the region even further by including the former Soviet autonomous republics of Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaidjan, Uzbekistan, Tadjikistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, all of which became independent states in the wake of the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Apart from Georgia and Armenia, which have their own non-Middle Eastern languages, the rest of these states use a language of the Turkic group akin to Turkish or, in the case of Tadjikistan, a variety of Persian. This introduction of new independent states using non-Arabic languages does of course have considerable geopolitical significance in the Middle East as a whole.

However that may be, the important thing is not perhaps to arrive at an absolutely watertight definition of what the Middle East is. Suffice it to recognize the general outlines and, from there, to examine the various interrelationships that bind this group of countries together, for better or for worse.

WARS

The Israeli/Arab Conflict

In the minds of many people the Middle East is almost synonymous with the Middle East crisis, and Middle East crisis is the shorthand we have come to adopt to refer to the long-standing conflict between Israel and Palestine, and more broadly with all the Arab states.

There is not time here to go into all the details of this conflict. In summary the conflict began long before the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. The idea of creating a national homeland for the Jews can in fact be traced back to the Ottoman period, but it became especially acute during the period of the British mandate. It was during this period that an Anglo-French agreement was reached, in 1916, known as the Sykes-Picot agreement, which, while accepting the principle of Arab independence, nevertheless divided the area into zones of permanent influence for the British and the French. And it

was during the same period that a British document of 1917, the Balfour declaration, stated that the British government viewed with favour the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine. This issue went on to assume immense proportions in the light of the Nazi Holocaust leading the extermination of a large part of the Jewish population in Europe during the Second World War. This event gave extreme pertinence to the claims of the Zionist movement. There was a mounting tide of Jewish refugees seeking a place to live. In April 1947, Britain, which had relinquished its Indian imperial possessions, announced that it was handing its Palestinian mandate to the United Nations.

The United Nations exercised the Mandate for about one year with Britain remaining as a kind of caretaker government. After lengthy negotiations the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution for the partition of Palestine into three entities: a Jewish state; an Arab state; and a so-called *corpus separatum* for the city of Jerusalem under international jurisdiction. Unfortunately, however, no provision was made for the implementation of this resolution. The Council of the Arab League declared that it would oppose the partition by force. By contrast, the Jewish leadership in Palestine accepted the UN plan and preempted the situation by declaring the establishment of the state of Israel on May 14, 1948.

Since that date, and up until the present time, the Israeli/Arab conflict remains unresolved despite all efforts to find a solution. The period since 1948 has been punctuated by wars between Israel and its Arab neighbours. In 1949, following the first war, Israel negotiated armistice agreements with neighbouring Arab states on the island of Rhodes and for decades these armistice agreements were the only basis for relations between the parties to them.

The most dramatic war was that of 1967, when in the space of six days the Israeli army inflicted crushing defeats on the armies of Egypt, Jordan and Syria, and on an Iraqi expeditionary force.

At the present, the state of play can be best summarized as follows, using the brief explanations provided on the BBC website:

“ISRAEL: While not officially abandoning the peace process, Israel's conservative government has made little progress because it believes concessions will sacrifice Israeli security and compromise Israelis' right to settle in the West Bank – the biblical homeland of the Jews.

“JORDAN: Jordan historically has been Israel's closest Arab ally despite its significant Palestinian population which is largely opposed to peace. But relations soured in September 1997 when Israeli intelligence unsuccessfully tried to assassinate a Palestinian leader on Jordan's soil. The two countries are currently trying to repair relations and move the peace process forward.

“EGYPT: Despite nearly 20 years of formal peace, relations between Egypt and Israel remain cool. Egypt largely supports its Arab neighbours' demands for Middle East peace.

Like Syria, it believes that Israel should pull out of the Golan Heights and the “security zone” in Lebanon. But as a key US ally, it is working to make sure that the process does not break down.

“SYRIA: Syria is a key player in the peace process, particularly since Lebanon is unlikely to make peace until Syria does. Syria sees itself as a champion of the Arab nationalist cause against Israel. It has refused to make peace until the Golan Heights are returned. Syria wants a united Arab peace settlement and is opposed to any unilateral peace agreements.

“LEBANON: Territory in southern Lebanon, occupied since 1978, remains in dispute. A UN Resolution calls for Israeli forces to withdraw from the area but Israel maintains that it needs a “security zone” to prevent incursions by Iranian-backed guerrillas. Israel's cabinet has agreed to withdraw on condition that Lebanon guarantee the security of Israel's northern border. Lebanon has rejected the deal and is unlikely to agree to a peace deal without the involvement of its powerful neighbour, Syria.

“JERUSALEM: A compromise over Jerusalem's future status has proved impossible to find. The city has been Israel's official capital since 1949 but has been the centre of Jewish kingdoms and the focus of Jewish prayer for centuries. The city also has religious and historical significance for the Palestinians. East Jerusalem is their residential and commercial centre and the main junction between the northern and southern parts of the West Bank.

“THE GOLAN HEIGHTS: The Golan Heights have a key strategic position and good water resources. Israel captured the territory from Syria in 1967 and annexed it in 1981. Syria continues to demand the return of the strategic plateau back in exchange for a peace agreement. Israeli leaders have so far said they will not surrender the territory.

“THE GAZA STRIP: Almost a million Palestinians are crammed into the Gaza Strip, a space only eight km at its widest point and about 45 km from north to south. The economy had effectively collapsed by mid-1993 and unemployment is rife. Since 1994, Gaza City has been the effective headquarters of the Palestinian self-rule authority.”

After those few quotations from the BBC website, intended to make the main issues in the Middle East crisis clearer, I would add that the current US attack on Afghanistan seems to have had the incidental effect of sparking renewed violence between Israel and Palestine, verging on war and this situation may prove extremely dangerous to the fragile alliance the US has apparently succeeded in forming in the fight against world-wide terrorism.

The Iran/Iraq War

The other major Middle Eastern conflict of the post-war period was that between Iraq and Iran. This conflict lasted from 1980 to 1988. It was devastatingly destructive of human life and it has been explained in many different ways, none of which is totally exclusive

of the others. It has been presented as a confrontation between two charismatic leaders, Saddam Hussein of Iraq and Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran; it has been seen as an ethnic conflict between Persians, on the one hand, and Arabs, on the other; it has been described in terms of an ideological clash between the Islamic revivalism of Khomeini's Iran and the secular modernism of Saddam Hussein's Iraq, an attitude that Saddam Hussein subsequently changed; it has been viewed in sectarian terms, as a war between the two major branches of Islam, the Sunni and the Shi'i; at the same time, economically, it might be interpreted as a struggle for control over the region's most precious resource, oil; and finally, it may be regarded as a territorial dispute and a struggle for regional hegemony.

The war ended to all intents and purposes in a kind of victory for Saddam Hussein, and it may have been this victory that gave him the courage, some years later, to attempt an annexation of the independent state of Kuwait, which Saddam regarded as a province of his own country. His invasion of Kuwait is what led to the battle known as Desert Storm in which the US and its allies forced Iraqi troops to withdraw from the territory they had occupied.

Other Conflicts

An account of the two major conflicts in the Middle East by no means exhausts the list of struggles that have afflicted the various states of the region.

In some countries, the ruling government has had to use force to suppress dissident minorities on their own soil. This has been so in the case of the Kurdish minorities in both Turkey and Iraq. In the Sudan, the Muslims in the north have had to contend with non-Muslim Africans in the south of the country. In September 1979 a confrontation occurred between the Hashemite rulers of Jordan and the Palestine Liberation Organization, which openly challenged the authority of the Jordanian state. The Palestine Liberation Organization was roundly defeated in this confrontation.

One of the most serious cases of internal strife was the Algerian civil war in the early 1990s. Here, a powerful Islamic movement challenged the legitimacy of the ruling Algerian government.

Yemen is a particular case. The country's existence as a unified state dates back only to 1990 when it was formed from the merger of the traditionalist North Yemen and the Marxist South Yemen. It remains a single state despite the civil war that broke out in 1994.

Syria, once the center of the Islamic world is a country of diverse ethnic composition, including Kurds, Armenians, Assyrians, Alawite Shi'is and Druses, as well as the Arab Sunni Muslim majority. In the period from 1956 to 1961 Syria merged with the Egypt of Nasser to form the so-called United Arab Republic, but this merged state collapsed following an army coup that restored independence to Syria. Since 1963, the leadership of the Syrian Arab Republic has been in the hands of the Allawite-controlled Arab

nationalist Ba'ath, or Renaissance, party, characterized by authoritarian government at home and anti-Israeli policies in its foreign policy.

SAUDI ARABIA

One of the countries of critical importance in the Middle East today is certainly Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia's significance is both religious and economic. As already pointed out, from the religious standpoint, Saudi Arabia is not only the geographic area in which Islam was born, but it is also, and precisely because of that, the center of the Islamic religion today. Mecca, the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad, is located in Saudi Arabia and it has become one of the world's major places of pilgrimage. All Muslims are supposed among other things to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lives. This pilgrimage is known to Muslims as the Hadj and a person who has made the pilgrimage is entitled to call himself a Hadji.

In fact many Muslims go to Mecca many times and at certain times of the year the desert road leading down through Jordan and on into Saudi Arabia is lined with hundreds of buses carrying pilgrims to the holy shrine of Islam. The buses stop at regular intervals five times a day to allow their passengers to go off and put their prayer mats down on the sand to allow them to pray. Admittance to the shrine itself is strictly reserved to male members of the Islamic faith.

Saudi Arabia is ruled by the Saud family, which is a monarchy whose roots go back far into history. The Saud family are themselves staunch allies of the United States of America. American forces have been based in Saudi Arabia in particular since the time of the United States' war on Iraq, when the Saudi regime felt in need of America's military protection against a possible attack by Saddam Hussein.

A key issue that arises in the present circumstances is the stability of the Saudi government. The country has immense oil wealth and in point of fact holds one quarter of all the world's oil reserves. At the same time the average living standards of the Saudi people has seen a steady decline from some in the region of US\$25,000 to its present level of only US\$8,000. Some commentators go so far as to maintain that, if the present government of the Saudi royal family were replaced, it would in order to give place to one that would in fact closely resemble the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. It might even be suggested that the on-going crisis in Afghanistan is nothing more than a Saudi crisis that has been exported to another country.

It is certainly a fact that of the terrorists identified as having taken part in the recent attacks on the United States, nine out of fifteen are now known to have been of Saudi origin. It is also believed that within Saudi Arabia funds amounting to as much as US\$10 million may well be funneled into support for terrorist organizations every year, though this is adamantly denied by the Saudi leaders.

It is not possible to predict what the future will hold for Saudi Arabia under present circumstances. It would however seem that Saudi Arabia is a crucial element in the

current crisis situation, first as a vital part of the perhaps precarious alliance put together by the United States to combat terrorism; and second as the source of such a substantial share of oil, that vital commodity for the survival of the present-day consumer society as people in the western world know it today. If the Saudi government were for some reason to be ousted and if the huge oil reserves stored in the country were to be destroyed in whole or in part by some terrorist attack, then the face of the world might begin to look rather different from what it does now.

CONCLUSION

Any attempt to survey a region as varied and complex as the Middle East is bound to oversimplify many issues and to leave many others out completely. We have among other things given little attention to the Cold War period of rivalry between the United States and the then Soviet Union, and the effects that this rivalry had on Middle East politics and economic development. I hope that the question and answer period will be an opportunity to raise some of the points that got left aside or to go more deeply into the ones I have raised.

I started by trying to suggest that there are usually at least two sides to any argument. Religion provided a jumping off point for this discussion of the Middle East. The focus was on the word “crusade” and the ideological overtones that this word still has today, many centuries after the Christian crusaders set out to recapture Jerusalem.

Another word that seems to give rise to similar reaction in the opposite sense and, therefore, to be fraught with the same emotional charge as “crusade” is the term “jihad”. “Jihad” in the minds of many western people is like with the concept of “holy war”. And more specifically, it is taken to imply that Islam spread over a remarkably vast area in a historically speaking relatively short space of time mainly as the result of a Holy War waged by warriors bent on imposing their religion on the infidel. Indeed, in little more than a century, the lands of Islam had spread throughout the Arabian peninsula, southward into Egypt, eastward across northern Africa to the Atlantic and, from there, northward into Spain. They had also spread into Mesopotamia and Persia and represented a direct threat to the eastern Roman Empire in Byzantium or Constantinople.

Of course, the word “jihad” does take on a variety of meanings among those who use it. One organization, apparently based in Syria and financed by both Syria and Iran, is dedicated to fundamentalist Islam and set on the total destruction of the state of Israeli by holy war. That organization goes under the name of Islamic Jihad.

Notwithstanding these ambiguities and precisely in view of this rapid spread of Arab religion and culture, as well as Arab rule, in the early centuries of Islam, it is interesting and important to note that, in most cases, the conquest was a peaceful one, not an armed assault. In fact, Arab civilization was more often than not, so it would seem, marked by tolerance of other peoples and religions, provided of course that, like Islam, they were monotheistic. This tolerance therefore certainly extended to Christians and Jews. The only demand the Islamic conquerors made on those they conquered was the payment of

taxes. And even the taxes were less heavy than those imposed by other imperial powers, such as Byzantium or Persia. In other words in the early centuries of Islam, Jews and Christians were free to live and to practise their religion in peace.

In this context, therefore, the frequent western use of the word “jihad” to mean Holy War may sometimes be a misinterpretation and, as many Muslims have been at pains to explain in recent weeks, “jihad” may be more accurately translated as struggle, in the sense of the struggle that every human being must undertake in order to follow the precepts of their religion.

LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE

THE ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS – PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Any attempt to predict future events is hazardous to say the least. And this is particularly true of the Middle East at the present time. History did not start afresh on September 11, 2001. But some would have us believe that it did. It is true that an event of almost unprecedented significance occurred on that day, at least in the eyes of the American people. An attack was made on US soil for the first time since the Japanese assault on the American fleet in Pearl Harbour. The events of Pearl Harbour are themselves fresh in the minds of many Americans at the present time, among other things, because of the recent appearance of a major motion picture on that subject.

The analogy between these attacks has not been lost. At the same time however we can easily detect some striking differences between the two occurrences. In the case of Pearl Harbour, the assault was made by one state on another and it happened in Hawaii, rather far away from the centers of power on the east coast of the United States. Also in the case of Pearl Harbour it was easy to see that the attack constituted an act of war by one state against another.

When we come to September 11, the situation is a very different one. The destruction of the two towers of the World Trade Center and a part of the Pentagon constituted an act of terrorism. It is harder to understand how they can be categorized as an act of war. Secondly, they were an attack not on the military forces of the United States, but on the civilian population.

Notwithstanding these facts, the government of the United States chose to declare war on terrorism throughout the world and to endeavour to enlist the support of as many other states as it could, for and foremost its allies, but after them the remainder of the world community.

The NATO countries quickly concluded that there were grounds to invoke Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty by virtue of which an attack on any member of the Alliance is an attack on all of the other members.

The United States President declared that the terrorists would not succeed in changing either the foreign policy of his country nor its domestic policy. In reality we have seen that the terrorist attacks of September 11 have stood the foreign policy of the United States and its allies more or less completely on its head. Major shifts have occurred which not only represent a complete break with the past, but also leave a big question mark over their possible implications for the future.

To mention a few, the sanctions imposed on both India and Pakistan following both countries' nuclear testing in the mid-1990s were quickly lifted despite the fact that both the countries concerned had openly violated the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. At the same time the British foreign minister, Jack Straw was seen sitting in earnest discussions with the moderate prime minister of Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei, in an attempt to win Iranian support for the war being waged on Afghanistan. In this capacity the British government was acting in the stead of the United States of America, which has had no formal diplomatic relations with Iran since the time of the Iran Contra crisis.

The French government has been at pains suddenly to forge a cooperative relationship with Colonel Khaddafi, leader of Libya, with the same end in view. Particularly when one realizes that both Iran and Libya are precisely among the countries regarded as number one suspects in the realm of international terrorism.

A further repercussion of the ongoing war in Afghanistan is the effect it has on the only too familiar Middle East crisis, and as we have already seen the Middle East crisis generally means the long-standing conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbours, and more especially Palestine. The period since the start of the war has seen an ominous escalation of military action by Israel against the people of Palestine. And, under the present circumstances, desperate to hold together the perhaps fragile alliance with the Arab states of the Middle East, the United States has shown an unaccustomed concern to put a damper on the zeal of the Israelis. These efforts to quell the Israeli reaction, which was sparked off with especial force by the assassination of a minister in the Israeli government, do for the time being appear to be producing some results in the face of distinct reluctance on the part of the Israelis themselves. But it is still too early to foresee what the eventual outcome of this situation will be.

It seems equally true that American domestic policy has been turned completely on its head by the September 11 attacks, which were very obviously attacks on the principal bastions of American power, the financial world and the military establishment. Despite all assertions to the contrary, that the lives of the American people have been radically changed, and that they will remain so for the foreseeable future.

Since the devastating attacks of last September, however, the world, and in particular the United States, has apparently awakened to the existence of another much more sinister threat to its everyday life than that represented by conventional military force – or even the use of commercial aircraft to demolish skyscrapers. And that is the threat of biological terrorism. Indeed, the United States over the last few weeks has fallen prey to

a series of sinister incidents involving the use of the deadly bacterium *Bacillus anthracis*, or anthrax.

I intentionally used the words “apparently awakened” to this new threat, because any awareness of the real facts would make it hard to believe that the existence and use of such weapons could have come as a surprise. On the contrary, there is ample reason to know exactly the opposite.

In a book entitled “Living Terrors” by Michael T. Osterholm and John Schwarz, published quite some time before September 11, 2001, the authors point out that according to a 1999 report by a Commission of the US Congress “most of the nations identified as sponsors of terrorism have sought or are seeking weapons of mass destruction.” Those states were listed by the Commission as follows: Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Sudan and Syria. We note that of these seven no less than five are located in the Middle East. The CIA in a more recent report singled out Iran, Iraq, North Korea and Sudan as particularly worrisome nations in terms of biological terrorism.

And, as the authors of “Living Terrors” go on to point out “Americans who wonder where these nations’ bioweaponers get their technology might not need to look further than their own borders.”

Therefore, although one would certainly not wish to accept such a possibility, it does seem as if September 11 may have marked the onset of a new era, one in which biological weapons are indeed used against the civilian population. And, more significantly still, it seems that the nations most likely to be targeted by such use are still singularly unprepared to deal with its consequences.

Turning to the war itself, it does appear to be generally accepted that a country should not embark on military action unless it has a clear idea what the expected outcome will be and what the so-called exit strategy will be. In the case of Afghanistan the explicitly stated goal is to track down the Al Qaeda terrorist network and its leader Osama bin Laden. It is as yet uncertain whether this objective will in fact be achieved. Ramadan approaches together with the onset of winter. The terrain is notoriously difficult and all previous attempts to conquer the people of Afghanistan, by the Soviets and before them by the British have failed. The United States is claimed to have much superiority in terms of military strength and technological sophistication. On the other hand, the results of the conflict to date are far from suggesting that a clear-cut victory is in sight. It is possible that Osama bin Laden will succeed in completely eluding the grasp of those who are out to get him, either by merging into the civilian population or by some other subterfuge. This would undoubtedly create a major political crisis for those like President George W. Bush and Mr. Tony Blair, who have staked so much on his capture.

Meanwhile, criticism of the war is mounting, among other things, because of civilian casualties, the number of which is mounting despite the American protestations that they are doing everything possible to avoid them. There is criticism also sparked by the unaccountable destruction of a warehouse belonging to the Red Cross and a hospital

where as many as a hundred patients are reported to have been killed; and by the use of certain types of extremely dangerous weapons such as cluster bombs.

But even if Osama bin Laden is captured or killed, it is still far from clear that this will represent a real victory for the countries that are fighting against him. In the first place, it is more than likely that this will make him a martyr within the Muslim world and, by virtue of that, make it more and more difficult for the United States and its allies to hold together the coalition against terrorism.

Beyond that, there is the far from simple question of what will happen to Afghanistan subsequently, on the assumption that the war is brought to some kind of conclusion. A government has to be put in place and the ravaged country will have to be rebuilt. Who should form the new government? And who should undertake the rebuilding of the country? Will the United States walk away from the situation as it has been known to do in the past? Is there a role for the United Nations? And will the United Nations be prepared to assume that role?

One thing does however seem quite certain. The end of the war in Afghanistan, even if it is accompanied by the total elimination of Osama bin Laden and his Al Qaeda network, will not coincide with a cessation of terrorist acts throughout the world. To expect that to happen would surely be naïve. And, to be consistent with the declared policy of the United States, the President would have to continue the fight by turning to the other countries identified as harbouring terrorist organizations. Iraq might be the first, but – uncomfortably – as we have seen, the list also includes Iran, Syria, Libya and Sudan, two of which have been urged to join the present coalition.

Aside from this rather tantalizing issue, there is also a substantial body of opinion that would question the real motives behind the war in Afghanistan. There are some who would go so far as to claim that those real motives are not the pursuit of Bin Laden and the eradication of terrorism from the face of the earth, but rather the attempt to secure a position in the Middle East by encouraging the establishment of a well-disposed government in Afghanistan and at the same time to render access to oil supplies from the Middle East more secure.

We have already seen that oil is a vital issue in the world economy. We have also seen that the Middle East holds by far the largest part of the world's total oil reserves. And as pointed out earlier, no less than one quarter of these reserves are held by Saudi Arabia alone.

On the demand side by far the largest share of the consumption of oil is accounted for by the United States and Western Europe.

In times like these the motive to guarantee access to oil supplies becomes stronger than ever. This can be achieved as a result of the relations maintained with the oil-producing nations of the Middle East. It can also be achieved by diversifying the sources of the oil one consumes. This is the likely explanation of the decision of the United States

government to tap the oil resources of Alaska in the face of direct opposition from the environmental lobby within the country, which believes that Alaska is one of the last remaining areas of the world where nature is unspoiled by the intervention of man.

This desire to diversify the suppliers of oil also explains such recent agreements as that between Japan and the Russian Federation that will allow Japan to exploit for its own benefit oil resources located within the territory of Russian.

Another way of reducing dependence on supplies of oil from the Middle East is to develop and use other new and renewable sources of energy. But in reality the ground made in exploiting these forms of energy – which include solar energy and wind energy – still appears to be very small. There is certainly no immediate prospect of replacing dependence on oil by turning to other types of energy. And one of the primary reasons for this is the importance of economic viability of the oil industry and the vested interest of certain people in that viability.

Some would say it is no accident that the present leaders of the United States have a direct personal interest in this regard.

Of course, when we begin to speculate about all the circumstances underlying the events we see occurring around us, there is a temptation to indulge in all kinds of theories, most of which cannot be supported by any kind of tangible evidence.

It may be worthwhile listing some of these speculations, if only to give an idea of the confusion in people's minds when an event of the magnitude of September 11 takes place. Here are some of the questions people have asked.

Is there tangible evidence that Osama bin Laden and the Al Qaeda network were directly implicated in the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon?

Is the real motive for the war that of eradicating the threat of terrorism so as to protect the values of freedom and democracy? Or is it rather to secure the what are perceived to be the vital interests of the western world in the Middle East?

Was the attack a complete surprise or did some people have more advance knowledge than has so far been revealed?

Why were there so many cases of short selling of shares, inter alia, in the airlines whose planes were hijacked in advance of the event?

Was the whole thing a Jewish conspiracy and is it true that there were no Jews among the victims at the World Trade Center?

Ought the US authorities to have been caught so much off their guard when the first cases of anthrax infection began to occur?

Have the ordinary citizens of Afghanistan got anything to do with the situation at all? And is not this issue a Saudi Arabian one that has somehow got exported to another place? After all, the vast majority of those so far implicated in the terrorist attacks were not Afghans but Saudi Arabian citizens.

Has the use of anthrax got any connection with the terrorist alleged to have been instigated by Osama bin Laden?

Many of these questions, which have been asked at different times and for understandable reasons, might amount to the postulation of a conspiracy theory. According to such a conspiracy theory the whole thing would have been a put-up job designed to serve the interests of a small clique of interest groups. However, it is difficult on the basis of a sober analysis of the facts to sustain some conspiracy theory of this sort. At most, it would seem that the events of September 11 did serve as a “wake-up” call, but that the reactions shown by those who woke up, were in many respects naïve or opportunistic. Above all, it seems that these events have revealed some remarkable vulnerabilities in the western world and some remarkable weaknesses in the structure of a country that claims to be the world’s only remaining superpower. And the attempts to argue that these vulnerabilities and weaknesses are a direct outcome of the freedom and openness of the society in which they are found sound somewhat hollow.

In the foregoing remarks I have focused to a very considerable extent on the United States of America. This is to a large extent natural, since, as we have seen, there is a very direct link between what has happened in the US and the whole of the Middle East region. As a result of the events that occurred in the United States and, in particular, as a result of the manner in which the US government, its allies and the coalition members have responded to it, the face the Middle East region may be changed almost beyond recognition. The leaders of such countries as Saudi Arabia and Bahrain have been led to align themselves unequivocally on the American side. Iran and Pakistan have also done so, while nevertheless posing their conditions for such alignment and, in the case of Pakistan, expressing the strong hope the present war against Afghanistan will be short. On another front, the Israeli government appears to have yielded to American pressure to desist in its fight against the Palestinians, notwithstanding the ministerial assassination.

But how will all this end? Will the war be won? And what exactly does it mean to win a war on terrorism throughout the world? Will an acceptable government be found for Afghanistan? Will the Al Qaeda network be dismantled? Will the effort to root out terrorism be carried over into other countries? Can other countries be held responsible for the use of anthrax in the United States? Will the coalition hold together, even if the war drags on and fails to achieve its declared goal? Can those leaders that have sided with the United States, perhaps for economic reasons, withstand domestic pressures from groups deeply hostile to the United States and fundamentally sympathetic to Bin Laden and the cause of Islam? What repercussions will this war ultimately have on relations between Israel and its Arab neighbours? Will this situation have a positive or a negative effect on relations between India and Pakistan and, especially, on the fate of the disputed territory of Kashmir?

Discussion of the present crisis in the Middle East would not be complete with some mention of the United Nations. This subject can conveniently be divided into three parts, which provide answers to the following questions. What is the UN doing now to help deal with the situation? What has the UN done in the past? And, finally, what can the UN be expected to do in the future?

What has the United Nations done in the past?

The United Nations has an important peacekeeping role placed upon it by the United Nations Charter.

Article 1, which sets out the purposes of the United Nations, takes up the issue of international peace and security from the start. It reads as follows:

“The Purposes of the United Nations are:

1. To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace; “

It is Chapter VII of the Charter that deals fully and in detail with the measures the Organization can and should take when faced with an act that constitutes a threat to international peace and security. The terms of Chapter VII of the UN Charter can be summarized in the following manner.

The UN Security Council must first determine whether a threat to international peace and security exists. (Article 39).

The Council shall, before making further decisions or recommendations, first call upon the parties to comply with whatever provisional measures the Council deems are necessary and shall take due account of failure to comply. (Article 40)

The Council may decide what measures not involving the use of force, such as the interruption of communications and severance of diplomatic relations with the parties, and call upon Member States to apply those measures. (Article 41)

Should the Council deem that the measures taken under Article 41 are ineffective, it may decide on the use of armed force. (Article 42)

The remaining Articles of Chapter VII are mainly concerned with the peacekeeping mechanisms employed with the United Nations and, in particular, the manner in which States may be called upon to contribute troops to UN peacekeeping operations.

Article 51, the last of the articles in Chapter VII, is worthy of note. It stipulates the inherent right of member states to defend themselves until such time as the Security Council has taken measures to restore international peace and security.

There is therefore a clearly defined legal framework for the settlement of international disputes under international law.

However, as we are well aware, no human institution is perfect and no legal system functions as it was in theory intended to operate. The reality is that many factors intervene to complicate the smooth application of the legal procedures laid down by the United Nations Charter. Some of these factors are external to the Organization and some of them are internal to it.

One of the paramount issues is the fact that international law itself is not backed by any power of enforcement. States may violate the provisions of international law with considerable impunity, since the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice is not binding upon States that choose not to accept that jurisdiction.

There is of course a general motivation to comply with treaties and agreements of all kinds that arises from the desire for reciprocal behaviour on the part of other States. It nonetheless remains true that in the international arena might is right and a State that feels strong enough to do so may well circumvent the stipulations of international law. Progress towards the establishment of a genuinely enforceable international legal regime is slow.

A further important issue relates to finance. The United Nations is in theory funded on the basis of a scale of contributions determined for each Member State on the basis of certain parameters, such as population and per capita income. The result of this is that certain States are on paper very substantial contributors to the UN budget. At the same time, each Member State enjoys one vote in the General Assembly regardless of its size and population and regardless therefore of its contribution to the overall budget.

This system of variable contributions and the possession of one vote can be defended as a satisfactory way of ensuring that even very poor States are enabled to make their voices heard in the international community. The disadvantage, however, is that larger contributors may simply decide to withhold their contributions if they feel that the decisions of the majority of States run counter to their own domestic policy or their interests in the world at large.

The result therefore is that the actual funding of United Nations' activities is not at all what one might imagine it to be on the strength of the scale of contributions.

Current total payments to the United Nations by the United States amounted to \$621 million, the Fifth Committee (Administrative and Budgetary) was told this morning as it continued its consideration of the financial situation of the Organization.

Evidence of the extent of arrears is provided by a recent announcement of the United States. The representative of the United States confirmed that last week legislation on the long promised \$582 million in peacekeeping arrears had been signed into law by President Bush and that those funds would be in the hands of the United Nations by 9 November. Payment of \$571 million in current peacekeeping dues had already reached the United Nations together with payment of \$23 million for the International Tribunals. For its regular budget assessments, payment of \$27 million had been made, and the remainder would be paid as soon as the United States Congress completed its work on the budget, which should be a matter of days. The United States remained staunchly committed to paying debts to the Organization. He noted the contribution of \$31 million by Ted Turner.

Speakers in today's debate welcomed the fact that, at the end of 2001, after years of crisis, the United Nations had a prospect of improving its financial situation due to the payments expected from Member States, particularly the largest contributor. It was said to be particularly satisfying since many countries had assumed an added financial burden, following painstaking negotiations on the scale of assessments at the end of last year. Delegates also expressed satisfaction that reimbursement of the amounts owed countries contributing troops and equipment to peacekeeping operations was being accorded high priority.

Several speakers, however, expressed concern that fewer countries had paid their assessed contributions in full this year and stressed the need for all Member States to make such payments in full, on time and without conditions, thus carrying out their financial responsibility under the Charter.

Another burning issue within the United Nations, which has been under discussion for many years, but is still far from any satisfactory resolution, is the so-called veto right of the permanent members of the Security Council. There are five permanent members of the Security Council, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, the Russian Federation and China, and this state of affairs is the direct historical result of the fact that the United Nations was itself formed in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. The present composition of the Security Council is seen by many as an anachronism in the modern world and there are many demands for a change in membership that would, for example, give permanent membership at least to two of the economically most powerful States in the world today, namely, Germany and Japan, and which would also allow the so-called developing world to have a strong voice, perhaps through a system of rotating permanent membership based on some kind of regional distribution.

For the time being, however, no decision to change Security Council has been taken and, since any such decision would entail amendment of the UN Charter, which in turn can only occur following a favourable vote on such an amendment by the Security Council, the present situation has many of the characteristics of an impasse.

Indeed, the voting rules in the Security Council are such that no resolution on such major issues can be adopted without the concurrent votes of all the permanent members, thus in effect giving the permanent members a right of absolute veto.

Since the same voting rules must also apply to any decisions taken by the Security Council under the provisions of Chapter VII, quoted previously, the Security Council has often found itself paralyzed and unable to act in crucial situations, this leading to a serious loss of credibility for the Council. And this is perhaps an additional reason why States sometimes feel that they must take matters into their own hands.

In terms of international conventions, the United Nations has since 1979 and to date adopted no less than four specifically concerned with acts of terrorism.

Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Crimes against Internationally Protected Persons, including Diplomatic Agents, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 14 December 1973.

International Convention against the Taking of Hostages, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 17 December 1979

International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 15 December 1997.

International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 9 December 1999.

At the same time it should be realized that the four of these Conventions, for the Suppression of Financing of Terrorism, has not yet entered into force for want of the required number of parties. There are in fact at present only four parties to this Convention.

In general, it would appear that one of the major obstacles to the implementation of any of the terrorist conventions adopted by the United Nations so far is the failure of the international community to agree on a definition of terrorism itself.

This digression into the inner workings of the United Nations is necessary to an understanding of the role that the UN might play in the present circumstances.

What is the United Nations doing now?

In the light of the above considerations, it is a significant measure of the unanimous condemnation of the recent terrorist attacks on the United States that the UN Security Council has succeeded in adopting two resolutions, 1368 and 1373, on terrorism since the events of September 11, 2001.

Resolution 1368, adopted on September 12, was a short recognition of the horrifying nature of the acts committed and an expression of condolences.

I cannot quote the lengthier and more substantial text of resolution 1373 in full. Suffice it to say that that resolution decisively condemns acts of terrorism in all their forms and calls upon Member States to take a variety of measures, such as the freezing of financial assets, to suppress terrorism within their jurisdiction. Inter alia, also, the resolution contains a decision to set up a special Committee of the Security Council on terrorism.

That Committee was constituted in early October when the members of the Security Council agreed to elect H.E. Sir Jeremy Greenstock, Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, to the position of Chairman of the Committee. In addition, the following have been elected to the position of Vice-Chairmen: H.E. Alfonso Valdivieso, Permanent Representative of Colombia, H.E. Jagdish Koonjul, Permanent Representative of Mauritius, and H.E. Sergey Lavrov, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation.

From 1 to 5 October, 2001 the United Nations General Assembly held an intensive debate on international terrorism. The debate was moved up from its previously scheduled date to urgently address ways of combating the threat in the wake of the attacks against the United States. 160 countries participated in the debate.

There was a unanimous condemnation of terrorism in the course of the debate. At the same time, the debate revealed some very different perceptions of what terrorism is and, to this extent, illustrates very well the difficulty experienced by the international community in arriving at any commonly accepted definition of the phenomenon.

The statement made by the representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, speaking on behalf of the Arab group in the UN, is very eloquent in this respect. Here are some of the things the Libyan representative said.

“First of all, the Arab Group condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, and condemns also all those who practice it, or provide assistance for it, be they individuals, groups, organizations, or states.

“It should also be remembered that Arab countries throughout many decades were prime victims of terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations: state terrorism, occupation terrorism, and the terrorism practiced by the extremist groups. We paid a high price for those acts of terrorism in terms of losses of innocent human lives. Until today Arabs lose their lives daily because of the continuation of terrorism.

“The Arab Group wishes to put in record that the Arab states which suffered from some forms of terrorism, carried out by extremist groups, requested some states upon whose territories the leaderships and members of those groups reside to handover the elements

who participated in the planning or execution, of those acts, so that they may be brought to justice. The concerned states, however, paid no attention to such pleas.

“Our group wishes also to record that some Arab leaders were the first who proposed to the United Nations, as far back as the early seventies, that an international conference devoted to the study of the phenomenon of terrorism should be convened in order first to reach a unified definition of terrorism, and subsequently an agreement on an international endeavor to eradicate it. Those initiatives were debated in the United Nations, and received broad international understanding, they included the invitation to hold an international conference to define terrorism, and another to combat terrorism. The summit of the Non-Aligned movement, the Organization of Islamic Conference, and other governmental bodies, endorsed those initiatives. That endorsement was embodied in the conclusion of the Arab Convention, the Organization of Islamic Conference Convention, and the Organization of African Unity Convention, all devoted to combat terrorism. All such initiatives and invitations are being constantly renewed by Arab leaders, until this week, and they are widely advertised in the media.

“The Arab Group is keenly eager to emphasize, with no limits, its affirmation of the right of the Arab Palestine people to freedom and independence. Furthermore, we affirm that until this goal is achieved, the Palestine people has the full right to resist the occupation, and all its consequences, chief among which is settlement, in addition to the right of those Palestinians, who have been dispossessed or deported, to return to their homeland, as they have no other homeland.

“The Arab Palestinian people are victims to modern terrorism, in the fullest sense of the word. Their land was occupied, their property either confiscated, or destroyed by bulldozers, and most of their sons and daughters were displaced, imprisoned, tortured, expelled, or deported, to the farthest corners of the earth, in order to empty their land so that foreigners may settle in it. The Palestinian people are subject to repression in order to prevent their members from even expressing their rejection to occupation. Most brutal, cruel, and inhuman means and methods have been used as tools for this repression, including the use of the most modern planes, carrying most sophisticated weapons, in addition to tanks, artillery, and political assassinations of all those who resist the occupation.

“In this respect, the Arab Group stresses its determination to confront any attempt to classify resistance to occupation as an act of terrorism. Such an attempt will turn concepts topsy-turvy, and only hatred can be engendered from this kind of oppression. Freedom is indivisible, and must not be diminished in anyway. Anyone who maintains otherwise cannot be convincing in his resistance to terrorism in the name of freedom or justice.”

We note therefore that the Arab Group “stresses its determination to confront any attempt to classify resistance to occupation as an act of terrorism.” This clearly opens up an immense area for argument as to what is in fact happening in the world today.

Meanwhile, on the ground in Afghanistan or in neighbouring Uzbekistan and Pakistan, the United Nations and several of its specialized agencies is working side by side with other relief agencies to try to deal with the looming humanitarian crisis created by the ongoing war. Lack of food and influx of refugees are all made more alarming by the imminent onset of the harsh winter climate.

What may the UN do in the future?

The United Nations has been involved in many peace-keeping operations, in East Timor, Kosovo, Somalia and Rwanda to mention only a few of the more recent occasions. It seems certain that the UN will be called upon once again to assume this kind of role once the fighting is over. From statements made by representatives of the US government, however, the war in Afghanistan may continue for two years or more before it is brought to end. Presumably the war will be considered as won, when and if the prime target Osama bin Laden is apprehended and the Al Qaeda network in Afghanistan is believed to have been dismantled. This will be a limited victory against terrorism, since we are told that bin Laden has already designated a successor, who is not in Afghanistan, and since we are also told that Al Qaeda has branches or cells in as many as fifty-five other countries.

Notwithstanding this fact, once “peace” has been restored to the territory of Afghanistan the UN will have to consider its future role within the framework of its existing legal procedures.

As already pointed out, Resolution 1373, among other things, calls for the establishment of a Security Council Committee and, in paragraph 7, the resolution directs the Committee to “delineate its (the Security Council’s) tasks, submit a work programme within 30 days of the adoption of (the) resolution, and to consider the support it requires, in consultation with the Secretary General.”

It may be hoped that, by the end of the war, the allied forces, by diplomatic means, have put together some kind of coalition government for Afghanistan, perhaps under the leadership, initially, of the former king of Afghanistan. As we have seen, this in itself may prove extremely difficult to achieve. There are even voices in the United States that urge full concentration on the pursuit of the war, leaving any efforts at nation-building aside.

When it is eventually deemed appropriate – in other words, when hostilities cease – the nation-building task will have to be undertaken. And this is the point when the United Nations may be expected to emerge directly on the scene.

Its task may not be an easy one. Its usual practice is to establish a peacekeeping force made up of troop contingents provided by so-called troop contributing countries. This UN force (known as the “blue berets”) is responsible for policing the territory and preventing further outbreaks of violence and, in past cases, such as East Timor, one particular country, Australia, has assumed a lead role in coordinating the action taken.

Within this context, various other United Nations specialized agencies will have their work cut out for them in restoring the infrastructure of a war-torn country – which means rebuilding the roads, railways, airports; restoring power supplies; reestablishing the health and education systems; and also preparing the transition towards a functional democratic society, with all the institutions of government, through the eventual organization of free and democratic elections.

It is clear that this work cannot start until hostilities are over, and even when it does begin we can expect that it will take many years and that it will experience many setbacks along the way.