

Coalition Cohesion

The Christian Science Monitor, February 5, 1991

Coalition Cohesion

SINCE Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, the White House ace has been the international coalition. Building on his sense of a "new world order," President Bush was able to gain global support for repelling Saddam's aggression and a quick UN vote for sanctions.

Getting the UN to support use of military force was tougher, but the administration pulled it off, after a November flurry of diplomacy by Secretary of State Baker.

Initially, the coalition was described as "the world" against Saddam. Yet if the air war against the Iraqi military fails to dampen the Iraqis' will to fight, and other nations begin to pursue their own agendas, as a practical matter Americans may have to reassess the depth of support for the US-led effort. Some coalition members may find it expedient to support the US, the world's major superpower, today. But their long-term commitment isn't sure.

Some \$35 billion in war costs has been promised the US by coalition members. But it is not clear how many other nations will fight with the US on the ground.

A quick US-led victory would end speculation. One hopes and prays the war ends quickly.

However, short of a quick victory, the developing attitude of coalition nations - both their governments and populations - must be considered. Not all nations feel as strongly as US leaders that the war is "moral." Many won't care about what Mr. Bush

terms "the hard work of freedom," nor will most rally around the US flag. Some countries may disagree with the "early war" option taken by the US. Others may see the US as diplomatically vulnerable. Still others may try to exploit anti-US or anti-Western sentiment, and thus attempt to cover over their own ugly track records.

- Consider the Soviet Union. Hard-line statements from the Kremlin two weeks ago caused shock waves in Washington. Soviet backing is necessary to the coalition, and Moscow knows it. We hope its price for cooperation is not US silence about the Baltics. Much has been made of Soviet troop withdrawals from Vilnius and offers to return to dialogue with the Lithuanians. But how many occupied buildings have been returned? What about the other 300,000 Soviet troops in the Baltics? The Soviets have promised negotiations before - and then broken them off when world attention eased.

- In Europe, opinion about the coalition is divided. Many diplomats privately ask why the US didn't pursue a "soft power" sanctions approach, rather than a "hard power" military approach. There are questions about how exhaustive US diplomatic efforts prior to Jan. 16 were. Whether or not such questions are fair, they are being asked.

- In countries with Muslim populations, the jury is out. Moods on the Arab "street" change quickly. Last week Hosni Mubarak warned George Bush the Gulf war must end by Ramadan in mid-March and that Iraq must not be devastated, in order to quiet popular pro-Iraq forces. Sympathy for Saddam, or at least anger at US bombing, is found in Pakistan, Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Iran, Jordan, and the Philippines, to name a few. The US must speak to the grievances of Muslims.

- China, as reported in the Monitor last week, has attempted to smuggle arms to Iraq in violation of the UN embargo. Beijing will take advantage of whatever side "wins" in the Gulf - the West, or the third world. Beijing will also use the Gulf to cover its human-rights crimes.

The US-led coalition against Saddam is holding. Yet wars have unintended consequences and hidden costs. So far the US has engineered most of the war. How strong

will the coalition be once Kuwait is freed? The war's aftermath will be messy. The US must not be left propping up a barely formed new world order on its own.

Questia, a part of Gale, Cengage Learning. www.questia.com

Publication information: Article title: Coalition Cohesion. Contributors: Not available. Newspaper title: The Christian Science Monitor. Publication date: February 5, 1991. Page number: 20. © The Christian Science Publishing Society. Provided by ProQuest LLC. All Rights Reserved.

This material is protected by copyright and, with the exception of fair use, may not be further copied, distributed or transmitted in any form or by any means.
