

Quelle

NYT New York Times

Nr. 48,383

Datum 09.10.90

In the Gulf, Allies Are Doing Their Part

By Josef Joffe

AMERICANS once more are laying their lives on the line to snatch somebody else's oil out of the fire. And their allies once more are getting a free ride. Right? No, nothing is further from the truth.

To argue that the U.S. has no business going after Saddam Hussein because it takes hardly 10 percent of its oil from the region is just plain silly. Sure, the Europeans and Japanese depend on Persian Gulf oil for more than half of their energy needs. But this does not mean the U.S. ought to obey the Alfred E. Neuman rule ("What, me worry?").

Oil is the world's most faceless commodity, and there is only one market for it — a global one. Squeeze the supply in the gulf, and people in Peoria will suffer, too. If the price goes up in Rotterdam, it will soar in Texas. Alas, there isn't a single well in the world marked "For Europeans only." If there is less oil for them, there will be less for everybody else.

Are the Europeans and Japanese getting a free ride, courtesy of the U.S.? Usually they do whenever Uncle Sam flexes his muscles. But miracles happen. While the allies normally love nothing more than to hide behind Mr. Big, they have displayed a lion's courage this time.

Indeed, not since the Korean War has the U.S. managed to line up so many comrades-in-arms. At the top of a long list are Britain and France. No surprise, perhaps. France and Britain are great powers with traditional interests in the Middle East. Yet the Danes, too, have contributed a corvette, and the Norwegians at least are sending a supply ship.

The Spaniards, previously among the more anti-American of America's friends, have dispatched three warships. The Italians added three and a fourth, with eight Tornado fighter-bombers, is on the way.

The Greeks, who normally stick to griping about American bases on their soil, are in the gulf with one frigate. The Dutch and Belgians are contributing five naval vessels. Canada is out there with 2 destroyers and 18 fighter planes. And then there is Turkey, which has assumed an enormous burden by closing Iraq's main oil pipeline while massing 100,000 troops on the Iraqi border.

Josef Joffe is visiting professor of national security affairs at Harvard.

The U.S. ought to be gratified by such a show of force. But what about Germany and Japan, the two richest kids on the block? German mine-sweepers are cruising off Crete, where Iraqi mines admittedly are a bit on the low side, and the Japanese Navy is guarding Tokyo Bay.

Yes, both could have been more forthcoming, and early on, which would have earned them brownie points rather than a barrage of bile on Capitol Hill. Also, the German Constitution is far more permissive than Bonn likes to let on.

But irate Congressmen just as routinely fail to see that Germany probably made the biggest contribution to the American effort by quietly allowing U.S. bases and matériel in the country (contractually earmarked for defense of Europe) to be used in the deployment. Frankfurt is a lot closer to Kuwait than Fort Bragg, and that supply line is worth more than the entire German Navy.

If America wants to lead, then it must pay the price.

Still, weighed down by their violent pasts, Germany and Japan are understandably wary of brandishing force, and so they have delivered cash instead of panzers and platoons. Under America's prodding, the Germans have pledged close to \$2 billion, and the Japanese \$4 billion — hardly peanuts. Such "tokens" are not to be sneered at. For once, the U.S. has been able to forge a coalition that was but a dream in previous confrontations — whether in Afghanistan or in the gulf war of the 1980's.

This posse is almost ideal for American purposes. The Euro- and Nippon-bashers ignore a basic truth: You cannot solicit real capital without distributing voting stock.

Washington wants to run this show, and rightly so, because it has assumed the greatest risk and burden. Hence, the gulf coalition is just right. It delivers plenty of political support backed up by hardware and a lot of money while leaving the driving to President Bush. In the annals of international politics, this is the equivalent of a free lunch for the U.S. **AP25** □