

## FROM EAST-WEST TO NORTH-SOUTH CONFRONTATION?

The eruption of the crisis in the Persian Gulf, even before the Cold War was declared over, has led some to question whether the world may be moving toward a new North-South axis of international conflict, filling a kind of "vacuum" of international tension. Those who speculate about such a possible new global confrontation range from the atavistic right in Western countries who cannot conceive of a world without a looming threat and readily find it in the world's deprived non-white majority, to those who are concerned with the desperate plight of the developing countries and cannot conceive of a peaceful world while it persists.

In fact, the consolidation of Third World alienation into dangerous North-South confrontation could happen and rapidly, unless the countries of the "North" fundamentally change their thinking and action in relation to the three-quarters of humanity in the "South". The agenda for "security" as seen from the developing countries is also very different. For ordinary people, it centres on poverty, underdevelopment, environmental vulnerability, and oppressive social structures. For states, the combination of pressures, internal and external is constantly at the breaking point. For the world community it translates into security concerns with terrorism, drug trafficking, mass migrations, and environmental conflict as well as larger and worse wars.

Perhaps we have to be reminded that, from the perspective of most of the world's people, the Cold War can be seen as just another chapter in the arrogant history of several centuries of European hegemony. One of the effects of this epic and global ideological struggle between two great "European empires" was to obscure and/or appropriate unto itself many of the deep-rooted conflicts which simmer and frequently boil up in Asia, Africa and Latin America. More than 20 million people have died in wars of various kinds since 1945, and while the Cold War kept a kind of peace in the Northern hemisphere, it frequently contributed to bloody wars elsewhere.

We now face a paradoxical situation. The ending of the Cold War can simultaneously reduce the great power interference and intervention which has frequently exacerbated Third World conflicts; but, at