

# Bush Ready for Next War

## Is the Anti-War Movement?

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Bush is clearly gearing up for another “short” war before next year’s elections. Although many people have mentioned Cuba, Libya, and Korea as possible targets, it is likely he’ll go back into Iraq to “finish the job.”

Regardless of the location of the next “zap” war, however, anti-war activists in the U.S. have yet to seriously grapple with the inability of our movement to stop the last war. From the start of the “crisis” we were lied to by the government and corporate media, who carefully planned their deceptions to rouse the breast-beaters and militarize the public mind.

In a *Washington Post* report after the war, Maj. Gen. William Keys, commander of the Marine 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, discussed the psychological affects of the U.S. propaganda barrage: “U.S. intelligence so vastly overrated the strength of the Iraqi army,” he said, “that they built these guys to be a monster...I [actually] thought they were bigger people.” Because of the exaggerated claims of U.S. government and military officials, the report goes on to say, military personnel in the field were surprised that no Iraqi chemical weapons of any sort had been deployed; meanwhile, the U.S. used cluster bombs, anti-personnel weapons, oxygen-igniting air-fuel bombs designed to burn up all the air over whole areas and suffocate all life, and napalm, which burns the skin off people—all in the name of “civilization” fighting the “ruthless barbarians.”

The government is confident that its PR flaks in the media will, like Rumpelstiltskin, be able to “spin” those yellow-ribboned lies into gold forever, and parlay them into new electoral victories and conquests. But our concern is not simply a question of cover-ups and lies; it’s also a matter of the apparent eagerness of many people in this country to believe them.

The day before the bombing started, over 70 percent of the American people opposed a war. A few days later, the figures were reversed. In one sense, it is a tribute to the U.S. public that its “leaders” felt the need to orchestrate such an elaborate symphony of lies.

On the other hand, it is disgraceful that so many avidly believed them. The last thing the exulting public wants to hear about is war crimes committed by its leaders and troops that will destroy the pervasive mood of patriotic zeal and force people to defend their complicity in the unknown horrors.

The first flush of victory allowed them to brush away all the challenges raised by the very wide anti-war movement, as though they were only inopportune flurries of snow on an unseasonably mild March morning.

Listen up! Three hundred thousand Iraqis—including perhaps 100,000 civilians—were murdered by the U.S. military. And not a word in the press.

Many of them were infants who were killed in direct hits; others have died from dysentery, diarrhea, cholera, typhoid and hepatitis brought on by the bombing of Iraq’s electrical generating system, dams, desalination, water purification and sewage treatment plants. To the “brave” U.S. pilots who demolished Iraq’s utilities, these were all just “military targets.”

Three hundred thousand! When asked what would be the limits of the U.S. slaughter, brigadier general Richard Neal smirked: “We’re deep in Indian territory,” invoking the ghost of one of his predecessors, Gen. George Custer, to avenge that singular Anglo-American defeat at the hands of this continent’s original anti-imperialists.

The extent of the massacre at least got an airing in the British press. The London Sunday Times on March 3 estimated that “as many as 200,000 Iraqis may have died in the Gulf war, according to senior Pentagon officials. Preliminary reports suggest that allied bombing was much deadlier than previously thought and that thousands of Iraqi troops may be buried in bunkers and trenches.” Recently, New York Newsday reported that tanks, outfitted as bulldozers, swept tons of desert sand over the Iraqi trenches, burying alive any soldiers remaining inside.

“No official figures on Iraqi dead and injured have been released by the allies and no formal study to produce the figures has been ordered. Instead, the allies intend to keep the statistics as vague as possible, in part because the true picture is so horrifying. At the end of February, ‘Brig. Gen. Richard Neal of the U.S. Marines refused to put a figure on the casualties. ‘I am not prepared to tell you what the casualty rate is for the Iraqis. I think it’s going to turn out to be enormous,’ he said.”

A London *Times* Pentagon source added: “Like the Japanese in the South Pacific, we will still be discovering bunkers filled with bodies in 40 years’ time.” The *Times* continued, “That there are mass graves seems certain. A Palestinian in Kuwait City said he had helped bury many Iraqis killed in bombing raids. The authorities were trying to keep the deaths secret to avoid lowering morale.”

The anti-war movement fed the general climate of Bush’s mass murder, by emphasizing the demand: “Support our troops, not the war,” as though Iraqi soldiers, and civilians, truly were demons sent by the “insane” and “worse than Hitler” Saddam Hussein to “destroy our way of life.” Only—said this sector of the left, particularly the National Campaign for Peace in the Middle East—fighting them was not worth the price of U.S. lives.

In accepting sanctions, the anti-war movement leaders were complicit in demonizing “the enemy.” That was followed by a second strategic betrayal:

They attempted to channel the genuine rage of large numbers of people into “legitimate” protests, in order to influence those in power instead of creating a force to defeat them.

But January’s big protest marches in Washington were hardly the extent of anti-war sentiment in this country. For three months many, many nontraditional, uncompromising and vibrant actions swept from coast to coast every night. Even though they were hindered by a lack of significant financial resources available to the centralized national organizations, affinity group networks sprang up everywhere, spray painting the cities to break the media-imposed silence. In New York City, police barricades were gathered and burned in the middle of streets, as Coalition and Campaign marshals looked on helplessly. In San Francisco, antiwar people blockaded bridges and main thoroughfares every day. Others disrupted nationally-televised basketball games in Montana and Wisconsin by carrying anti-war banners onto the floor and refusing to leave—in Montana, to widespread support, including the players themselves who stood on the sidelines and applauded. Radical antiwar activists organized safe houses for deserters and resisters, shut down freeways, federal buildings and recruiting stations, and began generating a real climate of resistance in the U.S.

The split between the two national groupings hindered the anti-war movement from the start although, in hindsight, it is unlikely that even their unity would have prevented the bombing.

Here the particular circumstances were aligned against our anti-war protests: 1) Once the bombing started on Jan. 16, the ruling class was able, for however short a time, to override the inherent tensions and competing interests of its different sectors and remain unified behind Bush; 2) its executive arm was hell-bent on pursuing the war, no holds barred, civilians be damned; 3) external impediments to U.S. foreign policy (such as the Soviet Union) had been coopted into the battle; 4) large numbers of American troops were not coming home in body bags, which would have raised public outcry and heightened activities; and 5) there was no revolutionary movement here at home to speak of to strike real blows (in anything more than a symbolic way) at the war machine, to make it too costly for the ruling class to pursue its selected policy.

Each of these circumstances influences all of the others. Heightened public rage, for example, leading to actions like a general strike against the war, could split the ruling class and force a different agenda onto it. But in such circumstances as actually existed, there was probably nothing the anti-war movement, as it existed, could have done to stay the murderous hand of the U.S. president in so short a time. Given the probability of similar wars

occurring frequently in the next few years, the question is put to us: What are we, as a movement, going to do differently to prepare ourselves now so that, taking all of this into consideration, we will be in position to prevent future wars, or at least affect the outcome?

# fifth Estate

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