The Storm at Home

Max Elbaum sketches a history and draws an initial balance sheet of the U.S. movement against the Gulf War.

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From the onset of the 1990–91 Gulf crisis, George Bush's administration waged political and ideological war at home just as methodically as it prepared for military action against Iraq. Winning domestic support for the use of force was crucial not only for achieving Washington's goals in the Middle East. At stake was Bush's fundamental strategy of relying on military power to secure U.S. hegemony in the "New World Order." It's not possible to be the world's policeman (more accurately, the world's mafia) if the ability to employ massive violence is checked by domestic political considerations. So this country's 20-year-old Vietnam Syndrome had to be crushed as thoroughly as Saddam Hussein.

Setting such an objective required the administration to take on formidable opponents. For starters, Bush had to contend with major sections of the country's political and economic elite who held an alternative vision of the U.S. role in the post–Cold War world. In contrast to Bush and his "geo-strategists," these "geo-economists"[1] saw maintaining U.S. superpower status as principally dependent upon rebuilding economic dynamism relative to Japan and West Europe. They feared the political consequences of waging war and worried that bloated sums poured into the military-industrial complex would weaken U.S. capacity to compete with its capitalist rivals. These establishment critics had steadily gained influence during the latter half of the 1980s, as confrontation with the Soviet Union receded, competition with Japan and West Europe intensified, and deterioration of the U.S. social and physical infrastructure accelerated.

Bush was also up against broad-based popular reluctance to go to war. The invasions of Grenada and Panama had proved that the public would support military interventions that were short and not costly in U.S. lives. But opposition to U.S. ground troops engaging in what might prove a lengthy war, and skepticism about official rationales for such adventures, retained a powerful grip. A decade of jingoism under Reagan and Bush had chipped away at this legacy of Vietnam, but had far from eliminated it. In fact, the Vietnam antiwar legacy had received something of a boost during 1989 and 1990 as popular expectations rose for peace – and even a "peace dividend" – due to the demise of the Cold War.

Of course Bush and his inner circle also remembered Vietnam. The administration's entire campaign for hearts and minds at home was based on the lessons it drew from the failures of Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon. For Bush, Colin Powell, James Baker and company, the prime lesson was that more sophisticated use of military power, media manipulation, demagogy and anti-Arab racism could make war palatable once again.

Bush's most determined opponent in the battle to affect popular sentiment and influence ruling class debate was the grassroots-based antiwar movement. In less than seven months – from Bush's early-August troop deployment to the February 27, 1991 cease-fire – this movement generated a whirlwind of activism and took on a truly mass character. At its peak in January it was able to bring over half a million people into

the streets and influence the thinking of millions of others. The antiwar movement made numerous misassessments and had a number of serious weaknesses. But under difficult circumstances, it mounted a powerful challenge to Bush's drive toward war.

The movement was as heterogeneous politically as it was creative and energetic. Its bottom-line unity was opposition to U.S. military action in the Gulf. A measure of consensus was achieved about the central reasons for this stance: war would be immensely destructive in human terms; it would solve none of the longstanding political problems in the Middle East; it would divert resources from pressing social needs at home; it would exacerbate racism towards the Arab world, the Third World generally, and people of color at home; it would be an ecological disaster. But different parts of the movement gave these points drastically different weights, and on certain pivotal questions – especially the link between the Gulf crisis and Israel's continuing occupation of Palestinian land – certain sections conciliated the administration line. As for analyses of the underlying reasons for Bush's policy or opinions on strategy and tactics to combat it, opinions ranged across the map. Most activists condemned Iraq's takeover of Kuwait and were strongly critical of Saddam Hussein's dictatorial regime.

The movement was extremely diverse sociologically as well. Extensive grassroots organizing took place in nearly every potential antiwar constituency. Hundreds of local and sectoral initiatives were launched across the country. These provided the dynamism behind national mobilization and coalition efforts rather than the other way around. The movement's breadth was a source of great strength, though naturally tensions erupted in a host of ways.

Like the Bush administration, the antiwar movement drew many lessons from Vietnam. Thousands of veterans of the earlier movement, many of whom now occupy positions of influence in both progressive and mainstream institutions, threw themselves into protests. In part for these reasons, the anti–Gulf War movement got off to a faster start and was, by and large, more politically sophisticated than its 1960s predecessor. But this was not a sixties replay. Rather, it was a movement rooted in the conditions of 1990-91 – a set of economic, demographic, cultural and political realities very different from those of 20 years earlier.

BUSH'S VICTORY

The war's outcome has changed those realities again. The world is a different place than it was before the Gulf war, and so is the terrain of U.S. politics. Bush largely achieved his goal of winning a decisive political victory over the Vietnam Syndrome. On March 1, the day Bush officially proclaimed that Syndrome dead, all the major media echoed his assessment and his approval rating reached 91%, the highest any president has attained since the week of the Nazi surrender in World War II. Even as newspapers began to report that the number of Iraqi dead may go as high as 200,000, the country is experiencing an orgy of victory fervor complete with hosannas about "how few people" were killed in the war. The spectacle reflects Bush's ability to manipulate popular opinion – but it is

John Jernegan/Impact Visuals

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also a sobering reminder of the profound racism and immorality embedded in U.S. political culture.

Still, all the flag-waving cannot turn the clock back to 1950. The Third World is not about to retreat quietly to colonial status nor is it likely that the U.S. economy will again enjoy a 20-year boom. The Middle East has not been "pacified," and soon all the regional problems exacerbated by Bush's war will begin to reassert their presence. The multi-billion dollar war bill will come due, adding more budgetary problems to a society already scarred by widespread poverty and social crisis. Bush's pre-war claim that the U.S. has "the will but not the wallet" to address human needs has far less credibility since billions were found to wage war in the Gulf. When the immediate euphoria of "victory" fades, the horrific human, physical and ecological carnage wrought by U.S. firepower will cause many individuals now caught in the "patriotic" tide to have second thoughts; and we can expect that once again broader layers of the population will be asking questions about the wisdom of the Gulf War and Bush's foreign and domestic policy in general.

To most effectively reach out to them, it will be important to apply the lessons from seven months of intense antiwar activism. This question doesn't only face the peace and anti-intervention movements, which have obviously been transformed. Every sector of the progressive movement will be reshaped by the formative immersion in political struggle of a new generation of activists.

Such a rich and complex experience will take a while to summarize. But it is not too early to begin. A useful starting point is to trace the main stages of the movement's development and identify the main characteristics of its work. The pages that follow make this attempt, dividing the movement's history into four main periods. The first began when Bush dispatched troops to the Gulf in early August, and the President, the antiwar movement and all the other main players staked out their basic positions. A new stage opened up November 8 when the administration doubled its deployment and made offensive action an imminent prospect; this period saw an unprecedented public disagreement within the elite which gave legitimacy to – and was prodded by – the growing grassroots-based movement.

The third period, which started January 16 when Bush went to war, was characterized by a grassroots mass upsurge with huge mobilizations and an elite closing-of-ranks behind Bush. The first expressions of pro-war grassroots sentiment also began to appear and Bush – able to hold his international coalition together and minimize U.S. combat losses – succeeded in gaining and holding substantial majority support. The final stage, a virtual walkover for Bush, began when Iraq made the first diplomatic moves toward surrender in late February. After examining each of these stages, the article concludes with a few observations about the movement's overall strengths and weaknesses and discusses some lessons from its experience.

I. THE BATTLE LINES ARE DRAWN; AUGUST TO EARLY NOVEMBER

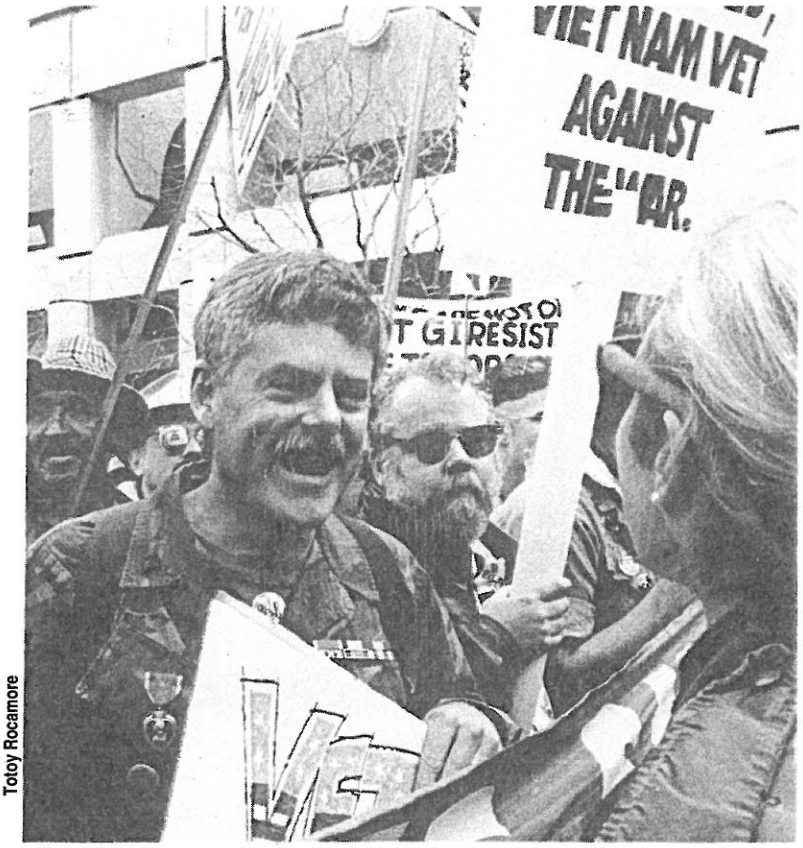
Iraqi troops entered Kuwait on August 2. By August 7 Bush had sabotaged efforts for an Arab solution to the crisis and manipulated an "invitation" to send U.S. troops to Saudi Arabia. Declaring that "Iraq's action will not stand," the President made it crystal clear that U.S. military action was a definite option. Immediately, a number of figures within the U.S. elite voiced anxiety over that prospect, and grassroots-based activists took the initial steps to forge a popular antiwar movement. But in this period the polarization between these divergent political forces was somewhat muted.

With Bush emphasizing defense of Saudi Arabia rather than action against Iraq, there was little disagreement within the policy establishment with the need to protect this oil-rich client state. Dissident voices limited themselves to warning that unwise decisions might be made in the future. Bush also limited elite opposition by going to the U.N. and winning overwhelming support – the Soviets included – for resolutions condemning Iraq's takeover. The liberal establishment was delighted, seeing this approach as a move away from U.S. unilateralism and a step toward strengthening international law.

Planning ahead, Bush also moved quickly to establish the main themes of his ideological campaign to prime the public for war. At this stage two objectives were primary: creating a demonic enemy whose image would stay in the public mind; and convincing the populace that this enemy could be defeated quickly and with minimal U.S. losses. Taking the Vietnam Syndrome head-on, Bush hammered the media day after day with his summation that "in Vietnam we fought with one hand tied behind our back." Knowing that the 1960s "war at home" was lost when the public could no longer visualize international communism in the form of Vietnamese peasants as a direct threat to this country, Bush set out to create a more suitable enemy this time around. As with Willie Horton and Manuel Noriega, the Bush high command, using every hypocritical and racist trick in its vast experience, began its campaign to turn Saddam Hussein – a petty dictator once favored by

Washington – into another Hitler.

Bush's multilayered strategy enabled him to seize and hold the political initiative. The President consistently garnered majority backing in popular opinion polls, though that support was widely noted to be "a mile wide but only an inch deep." Even sections of the progressive movement failed to confront Bush's policy at this stage. Jesse Jackson and SANE/Freeze president William Sloane Coffin initially supported U.S. deployment of troops for "deterrence" though not for offensive military action. The peace movement's longstanding neglect of the Middle East and vacillation on the justice of the Palestinian cause also took a toll. Particularly but not exclusively among progressive Jews, the argument that U.S. intervention was justified by the need to "defend Israel" prevented many activists from forthrightly opposing U.S. military moves. This could be seen most explicitly in the flip-flopping of *Tikkun* magazine and its editor Michael Lerner.



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Veterans and families of military personnel in the Gulf were in the forefront of antiwar activity.

But in the main, peace and progressive activists responded to Bush's policy with a burst of antiwar initiative. Before August was over dozens of protests had been held and local antiwar committees and coalitions had formed in dozens of cities. The impetus for starting such formations most often came from groups long active around the Middle East such as the Palestine Solidarity Committee or the International Jewish Peace Union; by activists from other sectors of the anti-intervention movement, especially the movement opposing U.S. aggression in Central America; or by various socialist organizations. But an outstanding characteristic of the initial wave of organizing was the degree to which it was not limited to these forces. On the contrary, activists rooted in other social movements stepped forward to assume prominent roles. So did a flood of people new to political protest altogether. The distinct character of the 1990-91 movement was established early on by the central participation of these constituencies.

MILITARY FAMILIES SPEAK OUT

Families of people in the military – as well as military personnel and veterans of previous wars – were right at the forefront. National attention was drawn to this phenomenon when an "open letter" to Bush from Alex Molnar, a professor of education at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, was published on the Op-Ed page of the *New York Times* on August 23. Entitled "If My Marine Son Is Killed" the letter declared: "Now that we face the prospect of war I intend to support my son and his fellow soldiers by doing everything I can to oppose any offensive American military action in the Persian Gulf. The troops I met deserve far better than the politicians and policies that hold them hostage." Molnar and others established the Military Families Support Network, which quickly grew to over 3,000 members united in opposition to launching a war. At the local level, people with family members in the military, as well as veterans, joined antiwar protests and organizations and were prominent speakers at rallies and educational events. The class-biased and racist nature of an "all volunteer" military whose ranks were filled by victims of the poverty draft was underscored time and again in antiwar agitation. Simultaneously, resistance took shape right within the military as several dozen men

and women declared themselves conscientious objectors and/or refused to be mobilized to the Gulf. Refusals accelerated after Bush's major callup of reserve units in November.

All this established a different dynamic than the anti-Vietnam War movement had in regard to military personnel. A lot of misinformation has been promoted about the 1960s movement being anti-soldier. Overwhelmingly, the anti-Vietnam War movement was sympathetic to the average GI, made extensive efforts to organize and defend the rights of servicepeople, and offered far more support to returning veterans than mainstream institutions or the general population. Those emphasizing condemnation of GIs as such were always a distinct minority, and by 1969 were far outnumbered by soldiers – including GIs in Vietnam itself – who were acting against the war. It is true, however, that the movement against the Gulf War was far more aggressive about linking opposition to Bush's policy with explicit support for people in the military, and gave far more attention to reaching the mainstream with this message. This approach enabled the movement to gain an extremely broad hearing during the buildup to hostilities. But the shade of difference between "Protect the Lives of People in the U.S. Military" and "Support Our Troops" can widen into a chasm once actual fighting begins, and some of the pitfalls of the movement's heavy emphasis on "support our troops" would hit home once Bush went to war.

PEOPLE OF COLOR SHAPE THE MOVEMENT

A second determining characteristic of the antiwar movement established from the outset was the central role of organizations and activists of color. Prominent figures in the African American, Latino, Asian American, Arab American and Native American communities were among the first to denounce Bush's preparations for war and to emphasize its inherently racist nature. Opposition was not limited to individuals or organizations who consistently speak out on foreign policy issues. The direct connection between pouring money into the military and cutbacks in social programs, as well as the disproportionate number of African Americans, Latinos and Native Americans in combat units, propelled the full range of community leaders and elected officials into action. A striking indication of the breadth of opposition in the African American community in particular came in early September when Rev. T.J. Jemison, president of the National Baptist Convention USA – the largest organization of Blacks in the world with 7.8 million members – denounced Bush's action in the strongest terms at his organization's annual convention. Throughout the crisis polls showed African Americans more opposed to war than any other group.

Additionally, a surge of direct antiwar organizing by activists of color rooted in community organizations, social service agencies, colleges and high schools began in August and accelerated after November. This initiative took a variety of forms: establishment of antiwar formations targeting a particular community of color; development of committees organizing on a people of color basis; bringing the structures of organizations built around domestic issues right into antiwar activity; fighting for full representation and leadership responsibilities in local and national multi-racial coalitions. This grassroots activity had a qualitative impact on the racial politics and composition of the anti-Gulf War movement.[2] Identification of the racist character of the war was established early on as an integral theme in almost all antiwar organizing. In some areas antiwar activities and organizations remained disproportionately white but in a great many it was not. And the extensive participation of people of color challenged white activists, especially those who have long predominated in the "traditional peace movement," to grapple in a concrete, up-close way with issues of racial/cultural bias and the distribution of power and leadership in coalitions.

ALL SECTORS COME OUT

Other constituencies also lent their strength to antiwar activism early on. Opposition was voiced at every level of the labor movement, in contrast to Vietnam when it took years of rank-and-file mobilization to squeeze antiwar endorsements out of the bulk of union officialdom. The Church sector added its moral authority, almost every major religious denomination going on record against offensive military action. A wave of student activism – building on several years of organizing around apartheid, Central America, campus racism, sexism and homophobia – swept colleges and universities. Many activists rooted in the lesbian and gay community – one of the most dynamic sectors over the last ten years especially because of the AIDS crisis – took up antiwar organizing. The main organizations of the women's movement denounced the looming war; feminists took the lead in pointing out the playground-style male posturing of both Bush and Saddam and the link between U.S. male socialization and resort to violence. A gender gap showing women more opposed to the war than men persisted throughout the crisis. The 1990-91 antiwa

movement was also distinguished by its stress on the ecological dangers of war and the participation of important sections of the environmental movement. Relations between all these sectors was not always harmonious. Struggles over racism, sexism, homophobia and class bias were frequent. But overall the movement seriously grappled with its internal conflicts and was able to build significant cooperation across sectoral lines.

Organizing took place in every part of the country, in big cities, campus communities, small towns and rural areas. A protest caravan linking the Gulf war with racism and poverty at home traveled through the South for a week in October. Sizable protests were held in supposedly "unexpected" places like Missoula, Montana.

DOMESTIC LINKS AND CREATIVITY

A particularly striking feature of the initial period of antiwar agitation was the extent of outspoken opposition from institutions and individuals focused on domestic issues. Voices from this quarter made the direct link between Bush's foreign adventure and funds drying up for social needs at home. This theme was established much more quickly and prominently than it was during Vietnam. So was the connection between corporate profits and war, through the popular "No Blood for Oil" slogan.

In part this stemmed from a conscious summation of some of the shortcomings of the anti-Vietnam War movement. But a larger factor was the fundamental difference between the U.S. economy in 1965 and 1990. In the mid-60s, the U.S. economy was hegemonic in the capitalist world and was still riding the crest of its long post-World War II expansion. This gave Lyndon's Johnson's effort to supply "guns and butter" at least a temporary material basis. But in summer 1990 the U.S. faced major economic challenges from Japan and a rapidly unifying West Europe, average real wages had been falling for over a decade, Reaganomics had gutted spending on social programs, and growing layers of the population, especially in communities of color, were falling right out of any social safety net. The country was entering a recession and numerous cities and states faced unprecedented financial crises. These conditions necessarily shaped the perspective of the anti-Gulf War movement and significantly determined the constituencies that would be most supportive of it.

The movement's remarkable cultural creativity was also established early on. There was an explosion of antiwar art in every possible medium and style. Satire and humor (including, at least in some areas, sexual humor: "Bush Gives My Pubic Hair a Bad Name" and beyond) became movement staples. A new generation of antiwar activists put their distinct stamp on the upsurge. Cultural workers contributed their special talents, but imagination-run-wild was hardly limited to those with expertise. Thinking up your own slogan and making your own sign became the norm. The results, noticeable in the early fall, became breathtaking by the time of the huge January mobilizations. Marchers walked on stilts, wore costumes, carried huge papier maché figures, played musical instruments, performed rap songs against the war, danced through the streets and transformed the colors and contents of the traditional antiwar placard. The still-expanding list of homemade slogans – from "Read My Apocalypse," to "Smart Bombs, Stupid War" – now runs to several hundred.

U.S. LEFT CONTRIBUTES

The U.S. socialist left didn't distinguish itself through humor or creativity, but it did bring dedication and experience to the antiwar upsurge. August 1990 had not found the left in good shape. While there had been a recent turn toward more cooperative relations among its main tendencies, the largest groups, whether democratic socialist or communist, were facing major difficulties.

Meanwhile the vast bulk of U.S. socialists and Marxists continued to function, as they had for years, as individuals. Even in such disarray, the left could and did bring a lot of specific skills to particular organizing efforts and individual left activists were central to many of the initiatives noted above. The left could also project valuable political analysis and historical perspective into the antiwar mix. (Special credit for this latter contribution should be given to the overworked community of left intellectuals who focus on the Middle East and to publications like *Middle East Report*.)

But this kind of left was too weak to play a strong, nationwide role in helping cohere the many strands of the antiwar effort. As a result, disproportionate initiative passed into the hands of a few sectarian formations (with Workers World Party and Socialist Action being the most prominent) who remained trapped in an old-style vanguardism which confused political leadership with dogmatism and skill at organizational maneuver. It is to their credit that these groups moved quickly and threw substantial resources into antiwar organizing; but their political approach was often more divisive than helpful.

Despite the highly visible presence of the socialist left, new international realities undercut the use of anticommunism as a weapon to un-

dermine the antiwar movement. In fact, some of the most anticommunist sections of U.S. society – Patrick Buchanan and his crowd on the extreme right – initially opposed Bush's buildup. Except for a few maverick "Republicans Against the War," however, this sector swung in behind the President when the fighting started and all along expressed hostility to the grassroots antiwar movement.

NATIONAL COALITIONS FORM

This early period also saw the formation of two coalitions that would attempt to call nationwide actions and coordinate national antiwar activity. The Coalition to Stop U.S. Intervention in the Middle East was formed in early August. The Workers World Party was the main initiating force, but from the beginning the Coalition included other activists with their own views and social base, not least former attorney general Ramsey Clark who was the Coalition's most prominent spokesperson. The National Campaign for Peace in the Middle East was formed in September by a broad range of peace and anti-intervention organizations, Middle East groups, community and student organizations and prominent figures from the Rainbow Coalition and various left tendencies. The National Campaign, after considerable debate, voted to include condemnation of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in its perspective; it also left room for a wide variety of views on the validity of economic sanctions against Iraq, the role of the U.N., etc. The Coalition, in contrast, abstained from any criticism of the takeover of Kuwait and took the position that sanctions were an act of aggression against Iraq.

Demonstrations in this initial period were frequent but not yet on a mass scale. Protest actions through August and September tended to draw numbers in the hundreds; only in New York and San Francisco did crowds reach 1,000. Larger demonstrations took place on October 20, a national day of protest endorsed by both national coalitions: 10,000–20,000 marched in New York, 5,000–8,000 in San Francisco, with smaller actions in dozens of other cities. October 20 protests also occurred in Europe and Japan, and from here on the U.S. movement would draw strength from and try to publicize the existence of an international antiwar movement.

Significantly, the movement did not limit itself to demonstrations. Right from the start, considerable attention was devoted to development of educational materials, holding teach-ins and community forums, going to people "where they are," and utilizing whatever media – mainstream or alternative – was available.

Though Bush's prelude to war was being played out in full view of the entire world, Gulf policy was not a main issue in the fall congressional elections. This indicated a number of things. First, it underscored the extent to which the Democratic Party mainstream was united behind Bush's initial practical steps and showed the Democrats' unwillingness to take stands that would foster the development of a grassroots movement. Second, it highlighted the Republicans' reluctance at this point to make support for possible war a major campaign theme. (Public opinion polls showed support for military action dropping a few points each week from its early August peak. By October the public was split right down the middle.) Finally, the fact that looming war was a non-issue signaled the inability of the grassroots movement on its own to shape the contours of national debate.

II. THE ELITE ARGUES AND THE MOVEMENT GROWS; NOVEMBER 8 TO JANUARY 15

Two days after the November 6 mid-term elections, Bush announced that he was sending another 200,000 military personnel to the Gulf, nearly doubling the U.S. deployment there. This dramatic escalation made it clear that offensive action was now on the administration's agenda.

Showing the Vietnam Syndrome's continuing strength, public support for Bush immediately dropped. A November 19 *New York Times*/CBS poll showed only 21 percent favoring rapid military action; 51 percent said that Bush had not offered a convincing explanation of why the U.S. was in the Gulf.

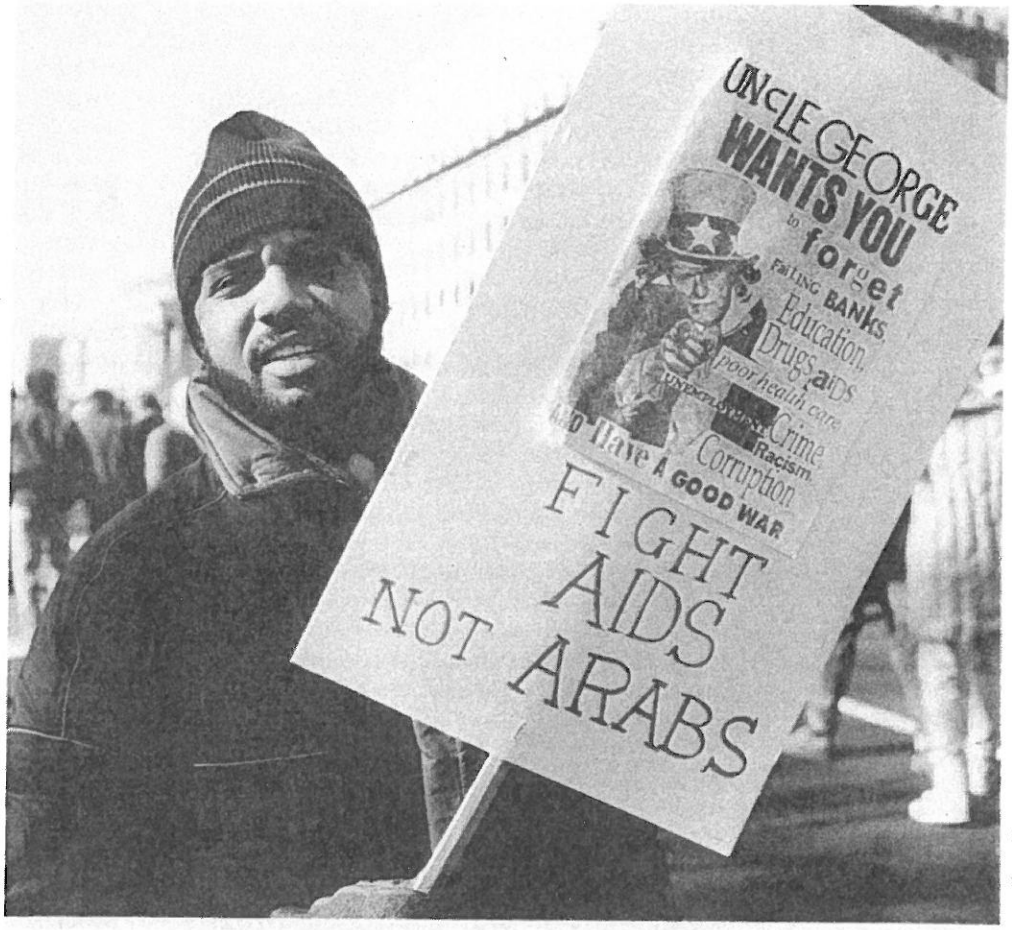
The administration took the polls seriously and – showing its true attitude toward democracy – immediately sought a better set of arguments to win the public to its already-determined course. Before the 1988 presidential election this process had been conducted behind closed doors. Then Lee Atwater had used carefully selected "voter focus groups" to determine that the best way to win was to run against a Black man who had been convicted of rape. This time the public relations scramble took place in full public view. After a month or so of monitoring public opinion polls, the administration decided that campaigning against Iraq's alleged capacity to develop nuclear weapons was the winning ticket.

UNPRECEDENTED DISSENT

But Bush was facing far more than a reluctant public that could be softened up by a month o air-wave bombardment. The most striking feature of the weeks following November 8 was th

sharp and public opposition coming from people with impeccable establishment credentials. "Sanctions-not-war" dissent was not limited to Democratic liberals like Senators Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts or Paul Simon of Illinois. (In fact, many traditional liberals – such as Representatives Stephen Solarz of New York, Mel Levine of California and others closely tied to the powerful pro-Israel lobby – were in Bush's camp on this one.) Bush's policy was raked over the coals by powerful pro-military Democrats like Senator Sam Nunn of Georgia, hawkish ideologists like Zbigniew Brzezinski and conservative business leaders like H. Ross Perot.

These figures did not challenge Bush's goals of "liberating" Kuwait and strengthening U.S. influence in the Middle East. But they saw the risks in going to war to achieve those goals as immense: negative reaction in the Arab world, danger to the economy, potential upheaval at home. Establishment anxiety was so great that a class which vastly prefers to work out its policy differences off camera (restricting electoral contests to a battle of sound bytes), fought this one out in public. A particularly dramatic moment was the "beware-of-war" congressional testimony by two retired chairs of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and seven former secretaries of defense at the end of November. (This was the same week that the U.N. Security Council authorized the use of force unless Iraq pulled out of Kuwait by January 15.) Daniel Ellsberg called such public dissent on the part of retired military brass "absolutely unprecedented" and argued that "they would not have done so unless they knew the Pentagon was filled with admirals and generals who believe George Bush's rush to war in the Gulf is a mad course of action." Here was a situation dramatically different from Vietnam, where it took several years of unsuccessful military operations, heavy casualties, mass protests and international isolation to open up such serious divisions in the U.S. ruling class.



Tony Ryan

Activists consistently made the connection between foreign military adventures and resources unavailable for human needs at home

LEAP IN GRASSROOTS ACTIVITY

Such conspicuous establishment dissent had a complex impact. On the one hand, it opened a broad terrain for antiwar activism to reach out to a broader public. Taking an antiwar position was considered respectable and it was near-impossible to bait advocates of peace as unpatriotic. Opportunities presented themselves, at least temporarily, to stretch the usual boundaries of dissent in the media. The empowering idea took hold that it would actually be possible to marshall a national and international coalition sufficiently strong to prevent a war. All these were major pluses for the grassroots antiwar movement.

On the other hand, the prominence given establishment opposition voices served to limit the national debate – especially in the media – to "what will the cost be to the U.S. in terms of money, international reaction and casualties?" This narrow framework even affected the antiwar movement, exerting pressure to emphasize "legitimate" arguments about potential U.S. casualties rather than stressing concern for all victims of war. The problem with anchoring antiwar sentiment in the potential cost to "us" became brutally clear, however, when it turned out the U.S. military could slaughter Iraqis in

huge numbers without Washington's allies defecting or thousands of U.S. soldiers coming home in body bags.

But in the period before the war, the openings for antiwar activism offered by the deep split in the ruling class were paramount. Every antiwar constituency experienced a leap in activity. In the military, filings for conscientious objection increased, especially among reservists now being called to the Gulf. The first act of collective GI resistance took place November 24 when six Marine Reserves publicly disobeyed orders to report for duty. Local African American antiwar formations gained momentum, or formed where they hadn't previously existed, and steps were taken to develop the National African American Network Against U.S. Intervention in the Gulf. Four major Latino organizations – the League of United Latin American Citizens, Mexican American Political Association, the Latino Issues Forum and the American G.I. Forum – ran two full-page ads in the *New York Times* focusing on the negative impact war would have on the Latino community.

Antiwar positions were taken by numerous labor councils and individual unions, and an open letter to President Bush signed by the presidents of nine national unions –Communication Workers (CWA), Auto Workers (UAW), Electrical Workers (IUE), Teachers (NEA), Longshore and Warehouse Workers (ILWU), Machinists (IAM), Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers (OCAW), Clothing and Textile Workers (ACTWU) and Service Employees (SEIU) – was published as a full page ad in the *New York Times*. The Arab American community made its voice heard more strongly, and the ideological and material (FBI harassment, hate crimes) rise in anti-Arab racism became an issue for the entire antiwar movement. Jesse Jackson, William Sloane Coffin and other well-known individuals who had vacillated in August began to speak out against the threat of war.

Demonstrations increased in size, peace vigils took place on regular weekly or even daily schedules in hundreds of communities. Civil disobedience actions became more common. Well-attended teach-ins took place at numerous college and universities, as faculty as well as student opposition swelled. Local alternative newspapers and community radio (especially the Pacifica network, which did an outstanding job) began to devote more attention to antiwar coverage. Simultaneously "media activism" began to spread, as groups like Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) mobilized grassroots protest against the bias of mainstream news coverage.

Both national antiwar coalitions experienced rapid and conspicuous growth. A December 1 meeting called by the National Campaign for Peace drew over 300 activists representing 160 local and national organizations to plan a January national mobilization. Thousands of people, many of whom had never attended much less organized for a national protest, threw themselves into preparations for the January 26 action called by the Campaign or the January 19 demonstration sponsored by the National Coalition (see the box on the next page).

Some of the most important antiwar work consisted of "unseen" efforts at the direct base level. Thousands took the case against the war to neighbors, friends and co-workers, utilizing the flood of educational materials produced by national or local groups or simply speaking their mind.

THE WEEK BEFORE THE DEADLINE

Protest reached a fever pitch in the week immediately preceding the deadline for war. The long-awaited meeting between Secretary of State James Baker and Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz took place January 9 but produced no results. From that moment through the January 12 vote in Congress right up to midnight on the 15th the country (and the world) was immersed in the war-antiwar polarization. In supreme irony and obscenity, the January 15 date itself symbolized the two approaches to humanity's problems that were locked in conflict: Bush's deadline for war was also Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday.

The extent, and the limits, of the differences within the ruling class were highlighted most sharply in Congress. All through the fall, Bush had refused to take his case to Capitol Hill; he only proposed a vote when his calculations showed almost certain victory. The Democratic leadership had gone along, resisting pressure from progressives to schedule a clearcut yes-or-no vote on war immediately after Bush's escalation in November. After the January vote was scheduled, the top Democratic leaders officially led the opposition but didn't put any pressure on wavering members of their party. And the Democratic alternative was not a forthright opposition to war in any case; it was a "more time for economic sanctions" plan, which acknowledged the eventual "legitimacy" of initiating hostilities.

Despite these limits, the House and Senate debate was tremendously significant and extremely sharp. Dozens of Democrats pilloried Bush's policy on nationwide TV. References to Vietnam were constant and more than a few congresspeople denounced the race and class bias of the military and pointed out that only two of 535 members of Congress had sons or

Two, Three, Many Coalitions?

Two national demonstrations were called because the Coalition and Campaign could not agree on a single date for joint mobilization. For most of December this division was a mini-scandal in certain quarters of the antiwar movement. Bitter accusations flew back and forth, along with widespread criticism of both formations and calls for unity. A lot of energy was spent arguing about who-said-what-to-whom, which didn't shed much light on the real differences that had produced two national formations in the first place. On this level there were three points of dispute. The main and only explicit disagreement was that the two groups had differing positions regarding Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. The Campaign condemned Iraq's takeover on both political and moral grounds and regarded this as the only position that could anchor a truly broad antiwar movement. The Coalition saw explicit criticism of the Iraqi invasion as a negative concession to Washington. For some Coalition members this was a tactical position; others actually regarded Iraq's action as progressive.

The second difference, one of practice rather than principle, revolved around ensuring central participation and leadership of people of color. While both formations stated this as a goal, the Coalition (particularly in New York City where the two groups were centered) gave this major attention from the outset while the Campaign tailed. Third, the two groups implicitly functioned with different visions of their roles in the antiwar movement. The Campaign tried to build itself as an umbrella for everyone opposed to the war and was careful to adopt a tone and rhetoric that would ensure broad appeal. While the Coalition also sought a broad base, its tendency was to stake out the role of the "left force" within the peace movement. Although many Coalition participants beyond the Workers World Party (WWP) supported this strategy for their own reasons, the Coalition's strategy was given additional fuel by the WWP's longstanding agenda of building a semi-permanent multi-issue formation within which it would play the central role.

The disagreement over Iraq's invasion alone was enough to account for the existence of two different national formations, since it led to different approaches to ongoing organizing and educational work.

But the disagreements did not prohibit cooperation in mass mobilizations based on common demands to stop the war, bring the troops home, or use money to fight racism and poverty and provide for human needs. So a bit more flexibility by either group could have yielded a single date for a January national action. From the vantage point of early December that would certainly have been the most desirable situation. Once two dates were set, the nasty public arguments about why probably had as negative an impact as the problemof two actions. This was especially true since (1) neither January 19 or 26 came before the congressional debate on the authorization for war; and (2) the 1990–91 movement had not focused to that point on large national mobilizations, a large portion of the movement's base didn't see a problem with more than one action and didn't care who had called what. As it turned out, once a date which might have influenced a congressional vote was missed (and who knows when Congress would have voted if tens of thousands were scheduled to descend on Washington January 12?), two huge mobilizations right after the war started probably ended up bringing more people into the streets. By mid-January almost the entire antiwar movement had endorsed both actions. After January 26 the two groups issued joint calls for national protests, but by the time these were to take place the antiwar movement had passed its peak. ■

daughters in the Gulf. The momentum of the arguments against war was such that even many of Bush's supporters defended their position as "really a vote for peace." When it came time to go on record, Bush's margin was quite narrow – 250 to 183 in the House and only 52 to 47 in the Senate. No comparable establishment split on going to war had taken place since the Civil War.

Meanwhile grassroots mobilization became constant. In the days before the congressional vote antiwar letters and telegrams flooded onto the Hill and activists launched a mass lobbying campaign. (This effort did not involve all sectors of the antiwar movement, however, due to complacency or alienation from lobby-Congress tactics. After the war was over, Ron Dellums said he thought the antiwar movement failed to go all-out at this juncture and targeted this as the movement's biggest mistake.)

Still, popular activism reached such proportions that the *New York Times* carried a page one story (Jan. 11) headlined, "Drawing on Vietnam

Legacy, Antiwar Effort Buds Quickly." The story itself began: "Before a shot has been fired...an antiwar movement has been building...drawing on the legacy of Vietnam War peace activism. Every major religious denomination in the country officially opposes a Gulf war now as morally unjustifiable. ... "

On the weekend of January 12–13, vigils, rallies, town meetings and civil disobedience actions took place across the country. Actions continued January 14, and that evening saw the biggest single protest of the pre-war period when upwards of 30,000 marched in Seattle. On January 15, annual Martin Luther King birthday commemorations in dozens of cities were punctuated by antiwar messages; one of the largest was in Atlanta where several thousand people marched down Auburn Avenue to Ebenezer Baptist Church and stood in the rain listening to peace and justice appeals over a loudspeaker system. In the ideological battle of symbols and images, projection of Dr. King's vision and personal example of non-violent resistance to oppression was one of the most powerful weapons the antiwar movement had. Many of King's speeches, especially those condemning the war in Vietnam, were reprinted in the alternative press or broadcast on alternative radio, and because of King's stature, some passages even made the mainstream media. Protests on January 15 were round-the-clock, with many vigils and protests continuing right to and through the midnight deadline.

The movement was gaining momentum with each passing hour. Public opinion polls showed the country still split down the middle. Antiwar protests were spreading in Japan, Europe and the Muslim world where government figures were expressing last-minute anxieties about the prospect of war and calling for a midnight-hour diplomatic solution. Bush had his U.N. and congressional authorizations for war, but all these pressures seemed to be placing him in a tight, use-it-or-lose-it spot.

III. BUSH GOES TO WAR, THE ELITE CLOSES RANKS, AND THE MOVEMENT SURGES INTO THE STREETS; JANUARY 16 TO LATE FEBRUARY

Bush used it – and by this time almost no one was surprised. Less than 24 hours after the war deadline, the air campaign against Iraq began.

So did a heightened propaganda campaign at home. Bush got off to a fast start by claiming near-complete destruction of the Iraqi air force and "decimation" of the Iraqi Republic Guard within the first 24 hours. These claims turned out to be wildly exaggerated. But they were useful in establishing the idea that the war would be quick and U.S. losses light. This impression, combined with the surge of "rally round the flag" sentiment which has accompanied the first days of every U.S. war, gave Bush the political initiative.

The administration gave prime attention to censoring and manipulating the press. At this stage the main goal was to avoid a repeat of the 1960s when images of war's carnage became regular features of the evening news. Control was accomplished through an unprecedented censorship in which – with a few muted exceptions – the major media collaborated to the hilt. Meanwhile the very language of military briefers was recast to turn war into a Nintendo or football game, with "body count" banned from the vocabulary and human death turned into "collateral damage."

At the sound of the first shot, the ruling class immediately closed ranks. Almost every elite voice which had been shouting "Wait!" just a week earlier quickly signed on. The shift was registered for all to see January 18 when Congress overwhelmingly approved a resolution to "support the commander-in-chief and the troops." Only 12 representatives – 10 members of the Congressional Black Caucus (all Democrats), Democrat Henry Gonzalez of Texas and independent socialist Bernie Sanders of Vermont – showed that they were more than an up-until-the-battle "loyal opposition" by refusing to vote in favor.

POPULAR MOVEMENT ON ITS OWN

This rapid shift in the ruling class' posture left the popular movement on its own. Building on the momentum it had been gaining in the weeks before the war, horrified and angry at the violence underway, the movement responded with its most intense and large-scale activity yet. Emergency demonstrations following the outbreak of war drew thousands. Peaceful vigils, rallies and marches were the main form of protest. But actions included blockades of federal buildings and civil disobedience, and in several cities protesters disrupted "business as usual" by stopping traffic. There were a few instances of small groups of protesters smashing windows in recruiting stations or setting fires in trash cans. Police responded with restraint in some areas, with illegal arrests and unnecessary force in others.

There was an immediate expansion of organizing aimed at particular communities and sectors. A flurry of walkouts took place at high schools and junior high schools. An outburst of protest against censorship and one-sided coverage was directed at the major media.

The first two weekends following the out-

break of war saw huge national mobilizations in Washington, D.C. and San Francisco. January 19 saw 80,000–100,000 turn out in San Francisco and 40,000–60,000 in the nation's capital (plus 10,000 in Los Angeles and thousands more in other cities). On January 26, 150,000–200,000 marched in Washington, 100,000–125,000 in San Francisco, 25,000 in Los Angeles and many more in other places. As impressive as the numbers was the breadth of constituencies represented on the speakers' platforms and in organized contingents. On the day following the January 26 march, conferences of student antiwar activists drew 1,500 in Washington and 500 in Berkeley. Plans were made for an international day of student and youth protest February 21, the anniversary of the assassination of Malcolm X.

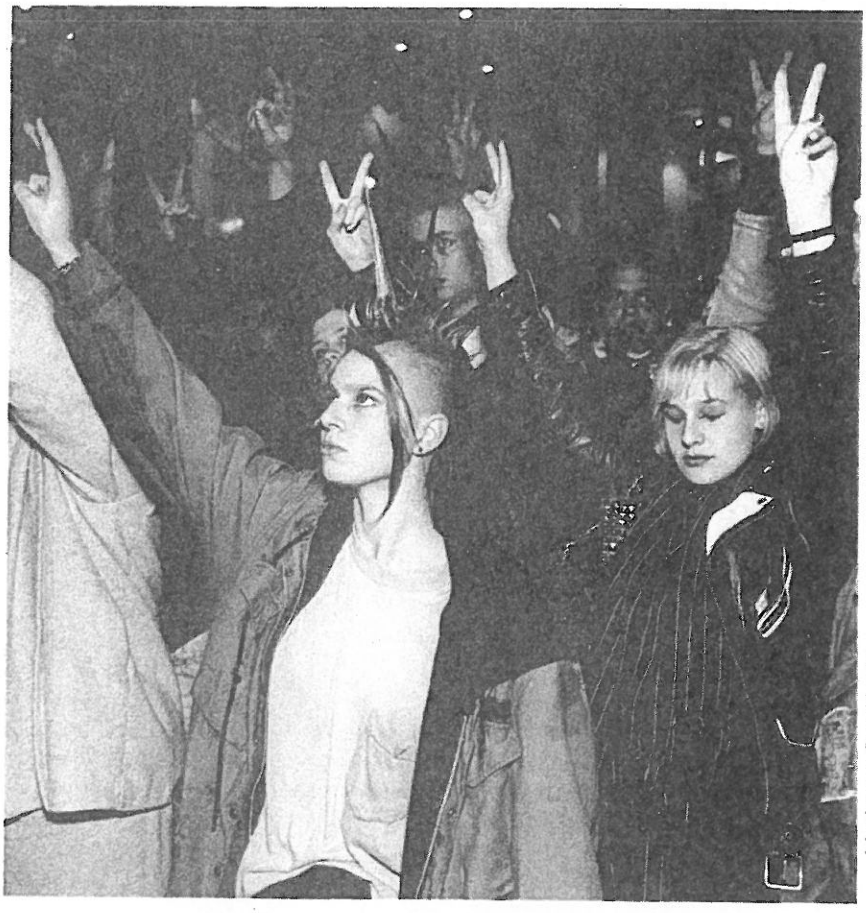
POLITICAL COMPLEXITIES

This zenith of antiwar mobilization unleashed tremendous energy. But it also spotlighted all the complexities of building and sustaining a broad-based movement.

One such complication involved the "Support Our Troops" slogan once fighting had begun. Logically, it was still true that the best way to protect the lives of U.S. military personnel was to stop shooting and bring them home. But in terms of conveying an ideological message, the beginning of combat gave every advantage to those who emphasized the "Our" in "Support Our Troops" and who wrapped into one package supporting the soldiers and defeating the "enemy" who was shooting at them. The administration succeeded in weaving defeat of Saddam, support for the country and support for the troops into a single message. And this message was attached to symbols with tremendous emotional appeal: the flag and the yellow ribbon.

The main tendency in the antiwar movement was an attempt to deny the pro-war forces sole claim to these symbols. Arguing that "peace is patriotic," most of the movement fought to get across its stop-the-war interpretation of "Support the Troops." The slogan "Support the Troops, Oppose the Policy" became widespread. Significant sections of the movement tried to appropriate the flag and the yellow ribbon, encouraging people to display these symbols combined with the peace sign or some other emblem indicating dissent.

Some positive results were achieved with this approach, in that it attracted a number of people who might otherwise have shunned the protest movement. In various conservative towns and parts of the country, it was almost a security necessity for any public antiwar demonstration. On the other hand, this tactic tended to push



John Jernegan/Ipact Visuals

A new generation of activists put their stamp on the antiwar movement.

exposure of the havoc being wreaked upon the Iraqi people to the background. As it became clear that Bush's war involved a lot more mass murder by air than combat between armies, more and more antiwar activists felt uncomfortable with the effort to appropriate patriotic symbols, or openly criticized it as a negative ideological concession to a government slaughtering civilians. In the midst of the intense effort to mobilize every possible ounce of antiwar energy, debate on this point was not at the top of anyone's agenda, and no consensus was achieved. (There was a considerable degree of unity in one area, however. The section of the movement that saw burning U.S. flags as a way to conduct the ideological struggle remained as small and isolated in January as it was in September. The bulk of the movement, whatever its views on "Support the Troops" or yellow ribbons, was focused on building broad-based support and saw this tactic as counterproductive.)

ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

Another controversy within the movement revolved around Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. From the beginning of the crisis,

one tendency among Jewish peace activists strongly resisted any criticism of Israel being part of antiwar agitation. By way of justification, they offered convoluted explanations about why Israel's illegal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza was "morally different" than Iraq's illegal occupation of Kuwait, or why sympathy for Iraq expressed by a desperate Palestinian population justified the Israeli government's unwillingness to accept an independent Palestinian state or an international peace conference. Those who disagreed with these positions, or who might bring up the issue of Palestinian rights without simultaneously pledging respect for Israeli "security," were accused of "Israel-bashing," or anti-Semitism.

Meanwhile the peace movement as a whole was publicly criticized for adopting a "knee-jerk" anti-Israel stance. (This was a major theme of a conference of Jewish activists sponsored by *Tikkun* magazine in the Bay Area in February.) All this intensified after Iraqi Scud missiles landed in Tel Aviv in the first week of the war, wounding many people and causing three deaths. After that attack – which was publicly condemned by virtually every organization in the antiwar movement, including Arab American and Palestinian rights organizations – a few Jewish activists swung to a pro-war position, while others stayed antiwar but stepped up opposition to any criticism of Israel.

This tendency came into sharp conflict with a significant layer of activists of all backgrounds (including Jews) who were committed to Palestinian rights and knowledgeable about the backward role Israel has played in Middle East politics for decades. Challenging anti-Arab racism, they pointed out how Israel was using the crisis as an excuse to step up repression in the Occupied Territories and stressed that only a settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict that protected the national sovereignty of both sides could bring lasting peace.

The bulk of the peace movement was somewhere in between. Most grassroots activists had at least some critique of Israeli policy and refused to let up in antiwar activity because of "defend Israel" appeals. And it is significant that both national coalitions were explicitly critical of Israel's illegal occupation and maintained that position through all the war's twists and turns. At the same time, there were more than a few cases where apologists for Israeli policy were able to take the process of planning a speakers list or writing a leaflet and tie it up in knots. And the movement didn't accomplish much in terms of denting the negative image of Palestinians and support for Israeli intransigence that holds such a grip on broad sectors of U.S. public opinion.

THE FLASHPOINT OF RACE

Race was another flashpoint of struggle within the antiwar movement. The disproportionate impact of the war on communities of color was so inescapable that virtually every sector of the movement incorporated that point into its perspective. But some groups and individuals did so reluctantly. More than a few voices argued that the only way to build a broad movement was to keep the focus narrowly on the war and de-emphasize "secondary issues." There was a none-too-subtle color code in the type of "breadth" that was envisioned in such an approach. The real issue beneath many a fight over how strongly to link the war to domestic issues was what importance to attach to fighting racism and to ensuring the central participation of people of color in the antiwar movement.

Controversy also swirled around giving appropriate recognition to antiwar leaders in communities of color – not just as representatives of a particular sector but as leaders of the movement as a whole. Conflicts on this point intersected with fights over the composition of coalition steering committees and speakers' lists. Even among antiwar activists there were many whites who could not imagine, or feel comfortable in, a movement where people of color held the levers of power.

Often these conflicts pitted activists from predominantly white peace organizations against activists from predominantly or exclusively people of color groups organized to take up domestic issues. An all-too-familiar pattern saw mainly white peace formations set up a coalition, establish its political perspective and a certain style and tone, and then begin "outreach" to organizations and activists of color. Such approaches, even when well-intentioned, did not work and were subject to serious criticism. The question was raised: is it ordained that an antiwar movement be led by people who "specialize" in peace activism – many of whom are able to do so because they are somewhat cushioned from the worst hardships in U.S. society? Or will the movement be more effective if it is led by those immersed in the day to day struggles of the oppressed? At times raising these points resulted in genuine dialogue across racial lines and a real overhaul in the leadership structure and method of organizing. But at other times whites in authority simply got defensive and continued operating as before, thus weakening the movement. (This pattern was not universal. Where antiwar organizing began with a strong multi-racial core, the movement developed on a sounder basis.)

Conflicts arose over how money for leaflets or other propaganda should be spent or what

neighborhoods marches should pass through. To many activists of color, the moral fervor with which some whites threw themselves into activity had a hollow side: where was the comparable anger at the daily devastation the Reagan-Bush administration has been inflicting on communities of color in the U.S. via poverty, unemployment, the assault on affirmative action, homelessness, crack, AIDS, and social service cuts?

DISPUTE OVER TACTICS

A final movement controversy worth noting is the debate over "militant tactics." Overwhelmingly, the anti-Gulf War movement set its sights on reaching millions, and used the criterion of broad appeal to evaluate any particular action. To a small section of the movement, civil disobedience fell into the category of "alienating" tactics, but the vast bulk of activists regarded civil disobedience directed at a specific government or military target as positive, whether or not they cared to engage in such activity personally. The heated debate was over other expressions of protest.

The movement was divided over the wisdom of blocking thoroughfares used by ordinary commuters. Many argued that disrupting business as usual made an important statement, especially in the first hours after war broke out. At least some of the traffic blockades involved thousands of people – not small isolated groups. But a majority of activists disagreed with this tactic. Turning over garbage cans and destroying government or military property gathered even less support. There were significant differences, though, over whether movement spokespeople should criticize such actions or limit themselves to declaring that the cause of any disruption was the war.

ing about the extent of Iraqi civilian casualties, his support stayed at that level. The first significant demonstrations in support of Operation Desert Storm began to take place. These were never as large as antiwar protests, but they received extensive media coverage and became more widespread through the month of February. Only among African Americans did a small majority register opposition to the war during this period.

Neil Cassidy/Impact Visuals

"Support the Troops/Oppose the Policy" was a major theme in antiwar protests.

BUSH HOLDS THE INITIATIVE

While these debates sharpened once the war began, the movement's main character in this period was intense, outward-looking activity. Tens of thousands of people poured their energy into antiwar organizing. The main problems they faced were not internal; they lay in Bush's power to manipulate public opinion and, even more than that, in the way the war was proceeding in the Middle East.

Immediately following the initiation of hostilities, Bush's approval rating went up to roughly 80 percent. As the air war proceeded with few U.S. aircraft losses, no defections from the international coalition and little or no media report-

By mid-February, Bush had near-complete political initiative. The public was apprehensive about the looming ground war, but this anxiety was not translating into stop-the-war sentiment. Even the first major expose of the air war's toll on civilians – the February 13 revelation that two U.S. "smart" missiles had killed hundreds of men, women and children in a Baghdad shelter – didn't have much impact. The administration claimed the shelter was a military target and responsibility for any civilian deaths rested with Saddam Hussein. The media and the majority of the public went along.

Inability to dent Bush's support was taking its toll on the antiwar movement. Nationally coordinated protests called for the weekend of February 16–17 were still substantial in size and breadth, taking place in scores of cities and drawing almost 10,000 in Portland and San Francisco. Many local groupings were getting better organized and producing more professional educational materials. But there was a definite drop in momentum relative to the peak of activity in January.

IV. THE FINAL WEEK: BUSH KILLS AND THE MOVEMENT REELS

On February 15, Iraq offered a new peace proposal which, for the first time, formally stated its willingness to withdraw from Kuwait. The plan included numerous other elements, including demands for withdrawal of all U.S. forces from the region and Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories. It was far too late for such a plan to have any impact. The President's harsh rejection of it won support from all members of his international coalition and from public opinion at home.

But the Soviet Union and Iran saw an opening to end the war and within a few days presented the first of what would be billed as "Soviet" peace initiatives. Each version provided for Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait, with the only "conditions" involving the details of the pullout and terms for lifting sanctions against Iraq. Iraq dropped all reference to its less-than-week-old plan and accepted the first Soviet proposal February 19.

But there was no way Bush was going to settle for anything less than complete capitulation. Achieving Washington's "New World Order" goals required a military juggernaut and casualties be damned, so Bush stepped up the bombing. And for once Bush's imagery matched his actions: while one U.S. commander talked of sending troops into "Indian country," the President took a leaf out of the Wild West gunslinger tradition and issued a "High Noon" ultimatum to Iraq February 22. Though the U.S. had already won, and further fighting was sure to mean huge Iraqi and at least some U.S. casualties, Bush won over 70 percent approval for his decision to launch the ground war.

What followed was a literal slaughter. Iraqi troops offered little resistance, with thousands surrendering or trying to flee. After two days Saddam Hussein ordered his army to withdraw from Kuwait but Bush still would not let up. Wounded Knee –style kill-fever soon swept the military, as described in a front page story on February 27 in the *Los Angeles Times*: "Again and again on Tuesday, loudspeakers on the carrier Ranger blared Rossini's William Tell Overture – the rousing theme song for the carrier pilots aboard, as well as for the Lone Ranger. Each time – instead of a 'Hi-yo, Silver, awaaay!' – another strike force of A-6 Intruder jets roared off the flight deck to bomb what one pilot called 'The Jackpot' – the roads north of Kuwait City, clogged with retreating Iraqi trucks and armored vehicles. 'This morning it was bumper to bumper,' said Lt. Brian Kasperbauer, 30. 'It was the road to Daytona Beach at spring break'. ... The giant carrier's skipper, Capt. Ernest Christensen, Jr. said he had received orders to extend the sorties from 10 a.m., the scheduled stopping point, into the afternoon to better destroy the fleeing army."

As the U.S. military moved from one "success" like this to another, Bush's support from the ruling class and his standing in the polls just kept going up. Even at the base level, antiwar activity was now overshadowed by a blitz of prowar demonstrations. Local elected officials who had opposed the war were being subject to intense pressures to switch sides. Police were emboldened; arrests just to intimidate protesters increased and officers more openly expressed hostility toward demonstrators.

MOVEMENT STANDS ITS GROUND

Though overmatched, the antiwar movement mobilized what resistance it could. When the Soviet–Iranian peace initiative was proposed demonstrations were organized demanding that Bush move toward peace. Efforts were made to get the "Negotiate – Stop the Killing" message into the mainstream media. After Bush's ultimatum, there were emergency vigils and protests. Other actions took place within hours of the announcement that a U.S. ground offensive had begun. Five thousand turned out at the largest action in the Bay Area, several thousand in New York. Activists scrambled to get out up-to-date press statements and agitational material.

Antiwar organizations worked right through the war's final days and after. Meetings and educational events continued to be held. There was no impulse to fold up activity: quite the contrary, discussions were initiated about how to refocus the movement for the post-war period. Steps were taken in many areas to begin production of informational material on the real costs of the war and expose the true nature of Bush's "New World Order." Groups readjusted their plans for demonstrations, turning protests scheduled after the war's conclusion into "Days of Protest and Mourning." An immediate impulse was felt to turn attention to campaigns for enforcing U.N. resolutions demanding Israel's

withdrawal from the Occupied Territories. Demands were raised to bring all U.S. forces home immediately – no permanent military presence in the Middle East.

Everything happened so fast that antiwar activists had huge political, emotional and psychological readjustments to make. It has not been easy for any of us to look squarely at the human toll taken by the war, the degree of support given to Bush by the U.S. population, or the political and ideological initiative now in the President's hands. But by and large early March saw antiwar activists forthrightly examining these issues, some in despair but many more determined to learn lessons for how to carry on the fight from here.

THE BALANCE SHEET

In the face of such a bitter outcome, a balance sheet of the antiwar movement has to begin by asking: Could the movement have prevented Bush's victory? Was there another way to build the movement that would have yielded a different outcome?

The answer is undoubtedly no. Overwhelmingly, Bush's gamble paid off because of factors far beyond the antiwar movement's control. The most important of these were: (1) the overriding our-future-is-on-the-line stake the U.S. military-industrial complex had in winning total victory over Iraq, preferably by actual war rather than just the threat of it; (2) the unwillingness of key governments in West Europe – in particular the Socialist government of Francois Mitterand – to break with Washington; (3) the deep crisis in – and politically disastrous stance of – the Soviet Union, which prevented that country from throwing much weight against Bush's war; (4) the overwhelming military superiority the U.S. held over Iraq; and not least, (5) the thoroughly backward nature of Saddam Hussein's regime and the catastrophic policy he pursued.

Within the historical limits set by these factors, the U.S. antiwar movement did quite well. It brought its message to broad layers of the population, galvanized a new generation of activists, built a new set of relationships between different sectors of the popular movement. It served as a supportive community of conscience for people horrified by the war, helping us take action and keep our mental health. These achievements stand despite Bush's victory. But a critical reflection on the movement's shortcomings, and the lessons from its experience, is also required.

A prime question to address is the antiwar movement's apparent misassessment of the relative military strength of the U.S. and Iraq. Antiwar activists were hardly alone in this error. While everyone across the spectrum knew that the U.S. would eventually win any shooting war, virtually no one predicted that the U.S. would prevail with so few losses. It is clearly necessary for peace activists to take a hard look at our estimation of U.S. technological and military capacity; and to make exposure of the inhuman destructive power of U.S. weaponry more central to all future anti-intervention efforts.[3]

This is connected to a broader point about the devastating character of modern war generally. The peace movement has targeted the genocidal/suicidal character of nuclear war for several decades. As many proponents of "new thinking" especially have pointed out, it is time to take a new look at "conventional" war as well. The scientific and technological revolution in weaponry has accelerated dramatically in the last 20 years, and such "innovations" as fuel air bombs, laser-guidance systems, cruise missiles and 12,000 pound "blockbusters" have blurred the boundary between "weapons of mass destruction" and the "conventional" arsenal.

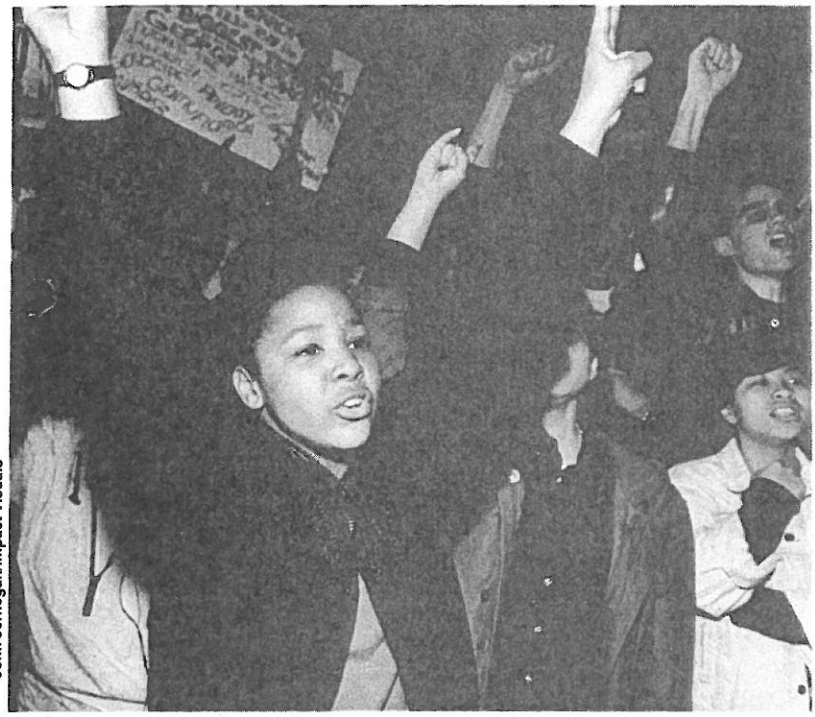
All this has led even a few in the capitalist class to question the viability of warfare as an instrument of policy. In the anti-Gulf War movement, the argument that "War is Unacceptable" as a means of dealing with any political issue was advanced by a range of people well beyond the traditional pacifist community. Obviously, Bush's "victory" has meant a severe setback for all those who want to take modern war off the imperialist option rack. But the scale of devastation in the Gulf puts the necessity of such a broad perspective squarely before all future antiwar movements.

EMPIRES IN DECLINE

The public's response to the war spotlighted the depth of chauvinism, racism and immorality in the dominant U.S. political culture. This can't all be chalked up to Bush's sophisticated propaganda campaign; it has a long history in the U.S. And now there is a new factor: typically, empires in decline turn toward militarism and seek popularity through foreign wars that promise to avert the loss of "number one" status. In the 1980s, Britain's war to keep the Falklands engendered a surge of racism and patriotism as large sections of the English working class cheered the defeat of Argentina and engaged in a flurry of physical attacks on Asians and Blacks at home. This ideological regression was a major element in the rise of Thatcherism. In the U.S., the last decade's surge of "national pride" over military "triumphs" in Grenada, Panama and now the Gulf, the retrenchment of racism, the rise in mean-spiritedness toward the poor and homeless – these indicate a similar dynamic

taking hold in the U.S.

Combating such sentiment will be a difficult task. The warmakers are most vulnerable when arguments are raised about worsening domestic conditions and the economic cost of foreign adventures. Less than a week after the war, for example, when Bush's approval rating on foreign policy remained upwards of 80 percent, a *New York Times*/CBS poll showed only 42 percent approval of how the President was handling the economy. And only 36 percent expected the future for the next generation in the U.S. to be better than life is today. But unless agitation on this point is accompanied by a straightforward ideological challenge to racism and jingoistic patriotism, the result may well be racist populism rather than a stronger progressive movement.



John Jernegan/Impact Visuals

A surge of activism by grassroots-based actvists of color shaped the character of the antiwar movement.

Especially in this context, the prospects for appropriating symbols of U.S. patriotism to the antiwar cause seem extremely dubious. We should not concede to the right the idea that advocating peace is unpatriotic, and it is a mistake to regard anyone displaying a flag or a yellow ribbon as the "enemy." But the experience of the anti-Gulf War movement shows the pitfalls of attempting to lend a progressive connotation to the symbols of a mercenary empire in decline. Any immediate gains fly out the window as soon as the shooting starts. A better approach is to find images that have national recognition but carry a very different ideological message. For the anti-Gulf War movement, the most effective strategy was projecting Martin Luther King as the symbol of what the country should be striving for in both foreign and domestic policy.

A CLASS PERSPECTIVE

Another instructive aspect of the Gulf War concerned the nature of divisions within the ruling class. Given the balance of forces in the U.S. today, no major political aim can be achieved without a section of the ruling class supporting it for some reason (pressure from the popular movement, "enlightened" self-interest, whatever). Any perspective that trivializes the importance of splits in the elite is left-wing posturing, not serious politics. Efforts to widen such divisions must be an integral component of any antiwar strategy.

This necessarily means giving careful attention to tactics that directly influence votes in Congress. Letter-writing and lobbying campaigns are crucial at pivotal moments. But in a more ongoing way, so is electoral work to defend the seats of representatives who do hold themselves accountable to a peace agenda, to expand their currently small number, and to "punish" the most ardent hawks. The ability to shift even a few congressional votes in January might not have been sufficient to prevent a war, but it would have put Bush in a much more difficult position.

Simultaneously, the war provided an unmistakable example of the limits of ruling class dissent and the importance of a popular movement not tied to it. Because of this, the question of class remains at the core of movement-building strategy. Narrow conceptions of who constitutes the "real working class" or dogmatic assertions that class position is necessarily the main determinant of an individual's politics must be rejected. But the prime importance of building an independent popular movement – and in the U.S. the popular sectors are overwhelmingly working class – cannot be stressed enough.

SEVERAL VITAL ELEMENTS

The antiwar movement's experience also shows the central importance of incorporating the fight against racism, sexism and homophobia into the fight for peace. The movement was strongest where communities of color were mobilized to play central roles, and where activists were most consistent in defending the justice of the Palestinian struggle and combating anti-Arab racism.

The last several months should also give us greater appreciation for the importance of

democracy within the peace movement. In part this means ensuring democratic decision-making structures in local and national coalitions – shortcomings on this score were at least partly responsible for the bitterness of the controversy over January 19/January 26. But there are other dimensions to this question as well. Much of the movement's vibrancy was due to the base-level creativity and energy expressed outside any formal organizational structure. It may not be possible to institutionalize this dimension of democracy, but it is certainly crucial to acknowledge and encourage it.

Likewise, the last seven months contain valuable lessons about tactics. Mass mobilizations once again showed their value for calling public attention to the existence of dissent as well as fostering a sense of community and empowerment within the movement. But their limits were visible as well. The movement is less skilled at conducting an all-sided public relations battle than at organizing demonstrations. Our side has lagged in mastering new communication technologies and the most up-to-date ways of making our message attractive and accessible. Without a sustained and professional effort to overcome this problem, we will find ourselves fighting a 1990s ideological battles with 1960s weapons.

The question of disruptive and "violent" tactics also needs to be addressed head on. Beyond civil disobedience directed at clearly identifiable targets, the movement's experience shows such actions are only productive as one-time "emergency" affairs, preferably at moments of extreme polarization such as the first hours after a major military escalation. This isn't a moral question: from a moral point of view, it seems to me that anything short of bodily injury to innocent people is "justified" if it would help stop a barbarous war like this one. And it only plays into the government's hands when antiwar spokespeople condemn those who are so angry and horrified they go beyond what's tactically wise.

At the same time, there is no point in obscuring the fact that actions which disrupt "business as usual" for the population at large must be used on an extremely selective basis if at all. Different tactical imperatives might apply if the prospect of changing government policy by "making the country ungovernable" was real. It is not. So for the most part, every effort should be made to channel the completely justified rage that exists in our movement into expressions of dissent that have broader appeal.

The movement against the Gulf War developed with a speed and breadth unprecedented in U.S. history. It mobilized the energy and imagination of thousands of people. The first full-scale political flow of the 1990s, the movement taught us a great deal about what peace-and-justice politics will look like in this new decade. Clearly, antiwar and progressive forces in this country face some very tough going over the next while. Drawing every lesson we can from the intense experience of resisting Bush's war will be one ingredient in making it through. ■

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1. The terms are Michael Klare's, from his excellent article in *The Nation*, October 15, 1990.
2. This fact, combined with misconceptions about the anti-Vietnam War movement, has given new lease on life to the summation that the 1960s effort was "a white middle class movement." That idea should be rejected. Then as now people of color were the most consistent base of antiwar sentiment; leaders and organizations of color – from the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee to Martin Luther King to the Chicano Moratorium to the Young Lords and Black Panther Parties – were in the forefront of opposition. What is true is that between the "top level" of nationally known leaders and the "base level" of community sentiment, there was often less of an ongoing relationship between white antiwar activists and activists of color in the 1960s than in the anti-Gulf War movement. By the late 1960s a noticeable divergence appeared between a largely white antiwar sector, especially among students and youth, that to one or another degree "supported" movements of Third World people, and organizations rooted in communities of color that centered on liberation from racism while incorporating an antiwar perspective. That pattern took hold because of complicated social and political dynamics which are beyond the scope of this article.
3. At the same time, this war was a profound example of the continuing interconnection between political and military struggle. The one-sidedness of Iraq's defeat cannot be separated from the fact that the country was led by an anti-popular regime pursuing political aims that were as unjust – though hardly as ambitious or world-threatening – as Bush's. No international front could be assembled to defend Iraq's illegal takeover of Kuwait. It was impossible for Iraq to forge strategic alliances even with others opposed to U.S. intervention in the Middle East. Iraqi actions were designed to ensure Saddam's political survival after a lost war rather than to defend the Iraqi people against imperialist butchery.
All of these factors affected every aspect of the military struggle, from how long the U.S. could go on bombing without its coalition falling apart to the motivation any Iraqi soldier had to fight. It may never be possible to determine the precise balance of political-ideological and technological-military factors that led to the Iraqi collapse. But one thing is clear in addition to the horrific power of U.S. weapons: if the U.S. chooses to fight, it will defeat any dictatorial regime pursuing its own aggrandizement rather than popular liberation. This is a warning against views of liberation struggles that play down political and ideological factors in favor of a one-sided stress on their armed component.

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