

The Nation.

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EDITORIAL

GORBYMANIA, GORBYPHOBIA

The results of the first nationwide referendum in the Soviet Union are as full of conundrums and contradictions as the U.S.S.R. itself. They show that a hefty majority favors preserving the Union, but it also wants meaningful sovereignty for the republics. How are these conflicting desires to be reconciled in a stable federation? What will be the fate of the large non-Baltic minorities and the economies of the Baltic States if they achieve the deserved independence that Gorbachev periodically seems willing to grant them? And what of Boris Yeltsin's victory—a majority favoring direct election of the Russian Republic's president? Will it put Yeltsin on a collision course with his own Parliament, which elected him nominal president by a bare four votes, and thus lead to yet another crisis in the fragile Soviet democracy?

Above all, what will be the economic effect of a renewed Soviet federalism? Gorbachev insists that he remains committed to marketization, but no one actually knows how to move the state economy quickly and surely in that direction, or whether the Soviet people are willing to pay the high price involved in such a transformation.

One thing is certain: Such perplexities won't deter American Sovietologists, amateur and professional, from another round of Gorbyphobia. Such mood swings about Soviet affairs are nothing new; but while the Gorbymania of the 1980s was merely silly, the Gorbyphobia of the 1990s is dangerous. Unreconstructed cold warriors and prodétente activists alike now compete to advise and aid their favorite Soviet "democrats," even though we lack the wisdom and the right to intervene in Soviet affairs. Editorialists and politicians demand

that we support Yeltsin as the "only alternative to Gorbachev," while the new despotism slouches from its provincial strongholds toward Moscow.

PEPSI'S
THE ONE
Jamie
Malanowski

'THE MUTLAA
MASSACRE'
Christopher
Hitchens

AGENT ORANGE
IN VIETNAM
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READING
AROUND
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KAZIMIR
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Arthur C. Danto

THE WARRIOR STATE

IMPOSING THE NEW ORDER AT HOME

ANDREW KOPKIND

War creates consent. The best wars—those that are fought decisively, are won quickly and cost little—deliver so much approval to those who wage them it's a wonder strong leaders allow so much time to pass between campaigns. And in the case of the United States, they don't. America has been in a state of war—cold, hot and lukewarm—for as long as most citizens now living can remember. The epic struggles against fascism, communism, nationalism and tin-pot tyranny have been used effectively to manufacture support for the nation's rulers and to eliminate or contain dissent among the ruled. Now, after a half-century of construction, the warrior state is so ingrained in American institutions, has so saturated everyday ideology, is so essential to prosperity—in short, is so *totalitarian*—that government is practically unthinkable without it. And from the look of things, that past may be merely prologue to a future dressed in khaki and marching in lockstep.

The late gulf war was a paradigm of modern militarism mobilized in the service of political command. The *casus belli* may have been Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, but the context was a long history of ambiguous military engagements as well as the current paralysis of U.S. government. The malignant post-Vietnam syndrome (disease metaphors recur in political discourse like a stubborn fever) was as much on the war planners' minds as the threats of Saddam Hussein. The enemies within and without were targeted

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she would respond to Western scientists who question the validity of data she and her colleagues have gathered, Phuong allows a sad smile to steal across her face.

Her answer is a simple one: "Please come." □

New Order

(Continued From Front Cover)

for ordnance or propaganda, whichever was appropriate.

From the start, the multistage and richly layered U.S. response in the gulf was strategically directed against the syndrome and all its symptoms: anti-interventionism, progressive political action, black and minority alienation and separation, Third World solidarity consciousness, radical environmentalism, cultural "permissiveness," feminist and gay activism, class and labor demands—all those movements, tendencies and patterns of thought and behavior that seemed to take hold in the American civitas and psyche from the Vietnam era. Victory in the gulf was supposed to produce the kind of harmony and unanimity that had not been seen in America since World War II—a model in many ways for this desert battle.

But there were pressing failures on the home front last summer as the gulf was simmering. The pathetic performance by both the Bush Administration and Congress during the long budget negotiations convinced many die-hard democrats that the political system of their dreams didn't work anymore in the real world. Talk shows and Op-Ed pages were full of discussions about the "excess of democracy" that had led to political paralysis. President Bush's popularity plummeted. Several states held referendums on limiting the terms of public officials, and voters in California and Colorado passed them with relish. Vice President Quayle rode the limitations idea for the Republican right and Bush endorsed it at the opportune moment, his favorite time of day.

What better antidote to excessive democracy, then, than war—its absolute antithesis? War implies command rather than participation, obedience over agreement, hierarchy instead of equality, repression not liberation, uniformity not diversity, secrecy not candor, propaganda not information. And the war state is so much more *efficient* than the quasi-democratic model practiced here, with its paralyzing quarrels, its contentious factions (also known during recent election campaigns as "special interests"), its occasional ideological loop-de-loops and its famous bad bargains.

"One reason the war was so popular," Vermont's Independent/Socialist Representative Bernie Sanders said recently, "was that something real happened over there—the military mobilization, moving half a million troops in a few weeks or months, was staggering; the war was fought quickly, effectively. Contrast that with politics, where you can't do anything, where nothing real seems to happen. And especially with last October, when the political structure was seen to be unmovable."

What's more, the war allowed Bush to clear the national political forum of all arguments that interrupted his monologue before the American people. There would be only one item on the agenda. The budget debacle was dismissed. The

S&L mess disappeared. Civil rights, child care, drugs, health and education, recession and economic competitiveness were dropped for the duration. Yellow ribbons replaced democratic dialogue. The media defined the good fight and then enlisted as loyal lieutenants of the warrior *kommando*.

Of course, much of Bush's success in waging war and managing consent was dumb luck. As someone wrote last winter, "Even a blind pig will finally find his feed." Saddam was an unambiguous villain, a stupid strategist, an incompetent statesman—and a military weakling, whose vaunted arms and armies were never a match for those of the world's sole surviving superpower. It didn't matter that the air war took longer and did less than was expected, or that the heroic Patriots sometimes hit Scud rockets and let the lethal warheads get through. The doctrine of overwhelming force allowed for a large amount of wasted weaponry and effort.

But luck wasn't all Bush had. Since Vietnam the U.S. military has indeed been learning its lessons and perfecting its management, and not only in the artistry of death. The Pentagon's public relations campaign—of which straightforward press censorship was only a small part—has yet to be fully exposed, but when it is, we will see how brilliantly the propagandists performed according to plans drawn over a decade. Every P.R. ploy was planned and executed like—well, like a Republican presidential operation in the age of Deaver, Teeter and Hill and Knowlton. This time, there would be no media-dumb generals blinking at cameras and lamely discerning lights at the end of tunnels. Heeeeere's Stormin' Norman! Color! Laughs! Emotion! Home video sales (forty-five minutes of the general's "final briefing") are brisk.

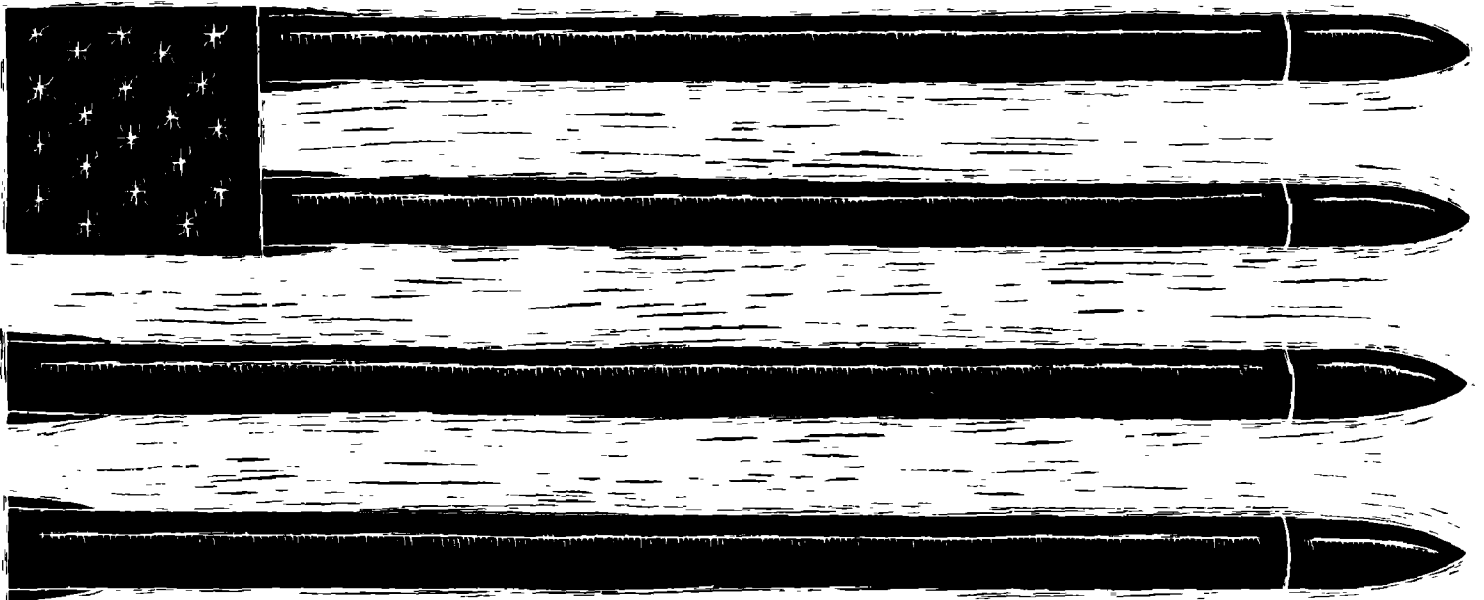
Even before the 100-hour ground rout and subsequent cease-fire, admirers of the gulf campaign began to think about ways to bring the war home. If America could be so successful in the desert (and in the P.R. effort), why not harness those arts and crafts to domestic affairs? A key document was provided by Anthony Cordesman, ABC's on-camera android for strategic affairs. Square-jawed, tight-lipped and broad-shouldered, wearing clear aviator glasses that somehow seemed molded to his face, Cordesman looked as if he was

chiseled from a mountain somewhere out West and wheeled onto the set of *World News Tonight* for his electronic chalk-talks and chilling military scenarios. On February 28, he dipped into print with a *New York Times* Op-Ed celebration of "America's new military culture," with its "implied . . . new civil-military relationship." In other words, America had won because politics was no longer in command—the warriors had taken over.

Cordesman worried that the wimps and appeasers and pound-foolish cheapskates in Congress would cut military spending after the war and thus throw the civil-military relationship off kilter. He did not, however, finish his thought. Money is a good way to keep the military in power, but it is not sufficient to militarize the entire political structure, to extend the combat culture to the social sphere. To accomplish that, heavy ideological work is required—starting, perhaps, with the destruction of the opposition (*any* opposition) as a legitimate political force. Republican water-carriers started that process while the bombs were still falling. As Bush made a show of bipartisanship and political generosity, the President's men tore into Democrats who had voted in January to postpone the shooting war. The media did their best to marginalize the antiwar movement (no big deal) and to bring the emotions of patriotism and militarism into every home with nonstop blather about our boys and girls at the front. Peace protesters never got their point across that the best way to protect our troops was to bring them home, for the goal was not protection but glorification.

Hovering over this landscape of authority, arms and ecstasy was a faint, familiar odor. "There's more than a whiff of fascism," Bernie Sanders said ruefully. More enthusiastically, columnists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak began to portray George Bush as a President from Valhalla: "There is something more," they swooned, "intangible and mystical, in the new relationship that now appears to bind the president and his country, affording him precious new strength." Further historical annotation seems superfluous.

For years there has been a small but influential intellectual lobby for limits on democracy. The Buckleyite, Birchist "New



Right" of the late 1950s and early 1960s yammered about America as a *republic* instead of a *democracy*, and they haven't stopped yet—see columns by Pat Buchanan and his kind. They still awaken from nightmares of the French Revolution, with visions of mob rule and the tyranny of unpropertied classes. More sophisticated political scientists, many of them self-styled liberals on certain issues, became enamored of authoritarian rule when studying Third World development and "nation building." Democracy in corruption-ridden, slothful, underdeveloped lands simply didn't "work." Many of those types were designers of America's policy in Vietnam. In particular, Harvard's Samuel Huntington, widely known by his sobriquet "Mad Dog," is always pushing for more command and less participation (one of his favorite political parables involves the comparison of the efficient, military-run U.S. Military Academy with the sloppy, citizen-run neighboring town of West Point).

Bush's eagerness to criminalize Saddam, and his desire to bring him to trial, are part of the overall strategy of identifying the police and military functions of the state.

We will soon see how the mystical leader will use his precious new strength to impose a civil-military relationship—indeed, a new order—on his own country, as he says he will do for the rest of the world. It is not clear that America is ready for *Bushismus*. The elaborate antecedents of authoritarianism in the Axis countries before World War II, and in many Third World states today, are simply not present in the United States. There seems to be no historical logic nor, yet, an urgent economic need for a rigid new order.

But popular frustration is growing, and the structural faults in the political economy are widening. James William Gibson, author of the trenchant book on Vietnam *The Perfect War*, has been working on a new study about the post-Vietnam culture, with its "warrior dreams." He says, "This [the victory in the gulf] is the culmination of the dream, what we read in Tom Clancy's technothrillers that have been so popular, the rejuvenation of the system by high-tech systems. Well, they got it. It's a very magical time. Americans hope that this will return us to a pre-Vietnam past, that the wicked spell has been broken. It's another example of America being regenerated through violence. But how long can cheap oil prices keep the structural problems from coming to a head?"

An indication of what may be in store for the country came in early March, when Bush proposed that local police forces take a leaf from the gulf war book and "take back the streets and liberate our neighborhoods from the tyranny of fear." The Administration's crime bill that was then introduced would

further emulate the style of war by eliminating a whole roster of civil liberties for "suspects" in criminal proceedings (i.e., enemy soldiers) and extend the death penalty as a way of institutionalizing state violence (i.e., indiscriminate bombing).

At the moment, such methods may be limited to minority ghettos at home and to Third World countries, while the middle classes and the elite enjoy the same kind of liberties they've always had. The show and threat of violence will still be used by America's leaders (mystical or mediocre) to impose order, only instead of communists the perceived enemy will be criminals—local hoods and international outlaws, like Manuel Noriega and Saddam Hussein. Bush's eagerness to criminalize Saddam, and his desire (now suppressed?) to bring him to trial, are part of the overall strategy of identifying the police and military functions of the state. There's a war on drugs, a war on crime and a war on international aggression. We are the world's military policeman. Los Angeles Police Chief Daryl Gates, who has instituted a repressive regime in minority communities as harsh as any police state in the world, is Bush's idea of an "all-American hero." According to the *Los Angeles Times*, Bush recently recalled that he stood with the Chief last year "looking out over a neighborhood where they reclaimed their streets, their kids, their future." So now may he stand with General Schwarzkopf, looking out over another neighborhood in the sand, where the U.S. world police have imposed another military reclamation.

The ghettos may be ungovernable now except by faux fascist methods, but the "talking classes" will not feel the jackboot or the lash until the need arises. Prosperity is a good guard against repression. But here the experience of war may not be so productive. Although in relative terms the gulf expedition cost little (one analyst thinks the Pentagon may "break even" on the operation, what with third-party contributions, creative bookkeeping and inventory depletion), over the long term it is part of a prescription for decline, not renewal. While America's competitors (Germany and Japan) continued to build their productive economies, America turned again to military concerns. If such tendencies persist and the policy managers go into world policing in a big way, any hope for economic reconstruction must be abandoned.

America learned that it can do war well. The temptation now is to apply that skill to areas where, of late, it has done poorly: the development of a prosperous, lawful and just society. That is precisely where militarism would be disastrously inappropriate. This may be a magical time for the warrior dreamers, but it is a moment of maximum danger for everyone else. □

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