

## VIEWPOINT

# There is a place for dissent in the time of war

I'm writing this for all those who have seen, heard of, or wondered about the Patriots for Peace, who for 21 Fridays stood in a silent circle around the Martin Luther King Plaza in downtown Pensacola, carrying signs that read, "War is not the answer." Many of you honked your horns, waved and gave us thumbs-up. Thank you.

In a military town, it isn't easy to dissent from policies that have taken us to war. One driver shouted, "Shove it up your a--!" Another, not realizing that many of us used our lunch hour to protest, yelled, "Get a job!" One man spat in our direction. A woman held up traffic to give us a brief lecture on the evils of the United Nations. Spring breakers, drunk on beer, pounded on their car doors and screamed, "We want war!" One man approached us and said, "I hate you!" An officer in a crisply ironed military uniform told us we were traitors.

They should know the people at whom they leveled insults. We are veterans from the first Gulf War, Vietnam and Korea. We are clergy, teachers, academicians, homemakers, scientists, students, engineers and office workers. We represent diverse religious backgrounds. Although some of us were originally strangers to one another, we are now bound by our opposition to an administration that has manipulated the public to generate support for a war that has killed our precious troops and innocent Iraqi civilians, among them children.

The freedom to dissent is universal, inalienable and not the gift of governments. Dictatorships are evil, and the people dictators rule frequently suffer unimaginable horrors. But our country has a long history of supporting ruthless dictators — as long as they didn't undermine our interests.

## About one man

Although many Iraqis are now celebrating, most Arabs view our aggression as a war against Islam. I'm reminded of a song my husband learned growing up in the mountains of North Carolina: "Run, get the ax; there's a hair on baby's chin." Wasn't this all about one man and his weapons?

I'm no apologist for dictators. I wrote about the evils of the Somoza regime in my book, "Nicaragua Divided: La Prensa and the Chamorro Legacy," and I would have been among the first to join the movement against Saddam had it not involved war. If our goal was to liberate the Iraqi people, then we should have been forthcoming. We could have recognized our historical blindness toward dictators



PATRICIA  
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and declared to the world that, from now on, the United States would exercise a uniform standard in regard to them. If heads of state abused the human rights of their citizens, they would no longer be recognized, and we would take every civilized measure to undermine their authority.

To muster support for the war, President Bush and his advisors blanketed the airwaves, inferring that Saddam was responsible for September 11. To date, however, no proof has been found by the CIA, the FBI or British intelligence linking Saddam to that heinous act. Also, if we had been serious about disarmament, we would have allowed the United Nations inspections to continue, despite the fact that Saddam received the very chemicals we feared from American businesses during the early years of the Iran-Iraq war, when Saddam was our friend. So why the rush to war? The answer should alarm you.

## Group pushes for war

The Atlanta Journal Constitution recently published an article by Deputy Editor Jay Bookman in which he revealed the path a powerful group of men took to influence the president to go to war with Iraq. Apparently using documents compiled by the Non-Proliferation Project of the Carnegie Foundation for International Peace, Bookman, followed by Newsweek and most recently by National Public Radio, outlined the trajectory to war: Disgruntled by our failure to oust Saddam in 1991, and by our abandonment of the Shiites in southern Iraq when they rebelled against Saddam, this group of neoconservatives, six of whom now hold key positions in the Bush administration, became the intellectual authors of a sweeping foreign policy change that President Bush adopted after September 11.

The plan, in the works for over 10 years, envisions a U.S. global empire and a Pax Americana, or an "American Peace." That is why you have read little about strategies we will use to extricate ourselves from Iraq after we win the battle. We will stay there.

Twenty-seven private citizens participated in the plan's culminating document, "Rebuilding America's Defenses." This



Members of Pensacola Patriots for Peace put on a silent protest in January against going to war with Iraq. Karena Cawthon@PensacolaNewsJournal.com

**NEXT SUNDAY:** "Support Our Troops" rally organizer Sam Mullins will respond in a Viewpoint.

2000 report, sponsored by The Project for the New American Century, chaired by William Kristol, editor of the Weekly Standard, called for pre-emptive attacks and the disregard of international opinion. It recommended massive expenditures to enforce the Pax Americana, the development of small nuclear warheads, and identified Iran, Iraq and North Korea as likely targets well before President Bush included them in his "axis of evil."

How will the U.S. preserve the new American Peace? Through "constabulary duties." This police work will "demand American political leadership rather than that of the United Nations." The 2000 report gave credit to a 1992 Defense Department document written by then-defense Under Secretary for Foreign Policy Paul Wolfowitz. When leaked, that draft caused such a fierce reaction that it was rejected by the first President Bush. Wolfowitz is now deputy defense secretary. Vice President Richard Cheney was defense secretary in 1992.

Yale professor Donald Kagan, who served as co-chairman of The Project, said that it's highly probable we'll establish permanent military bases in Iraq: "When

we have economic problems, it's been caused by disruptions in our oil supply. If we have a force in Iraq, there will be no disruption in oil supplies."

We have arrogantly waged war against a land that is thousands of years old, the birthplace of Abraham, ancient Mesopotamia. Although we've nearly won the battle, we may well lose the peace. It will take years to know the real cost — the destabilization in the Middle East; yet-to-come reprisals at home; the billions wasted that could have been used at home to bring insurance to the uninsured, preschool to poor children, decent benefits to veterans, and relief to a suffering world, including Afghanistan. We have ruined international alliances and neglected the Americas to our south that simmer politically and suffer socially and economically, some already in the throes of civil war.

## Syria next?

Although the majority of U.S. citizens supported the war, the majority of mainstream religious bodies condemned it. President Bush, a Methodist whose own governing body denounced the war, also dismissed the wisdom of Pope John Paul II, who sent his personal envoy to Washington to avert war. Although President Bush believes that God has led him to this juncture, "Humility," according to

Newsweek writer Kenneth Woodward, "not bravado, is the universal posture of anyone who dares to plumb the mind of God and seek to do his will."

Many of our detractors believed that, to show support for our troops, we should have stopped our silent vigils once war began. The term non sequitur is Latin and describes a conclusion that does not logically follow a premise. If we opposed this war from the start, why would we support it once we were bombing Iraq, losing our own valiant men and women, killing Iraqi soldiers who were following orders, and killing civilians to get one man and his weapons?

Most of us are not pacifists; we recognize the place of force, especially as required in self-defense, but the president and his advisors never made an honest case for this war.

Now, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld is pointing his finger at Syria, and the 21,000-pound MOAB, offensively nicknamed "the Mother Of All Bombs," having been tested here, and in need of field testing, is on its way to the Persian Gulf. It may not be long before you again see us giving witness to our dissent.

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