

DISSENT: Antiwar and Postwar, Too? You Bet

By Robert Kuttner

Sunday, March 23, 2003; Page B02

What does an antiwar movement do with a war likely to be over in a matter of weeks? Plenty, it turns out.

The antiwar movement is actually two rather different movements that partly overlap. One movement is in the streets and on the Internet -- often led by radicals, sometimes joined uneasily by liberals. The other is pragmatic and mainstream. Both were nonplused, but only temporarily, by the outbreak of war, and neither has gone away.

The radical antiwar movement opposes war in general, and the global projection of American military and corporate power in particular. A minority of this minority, such as the group International ANSWER, can be described fairly as Marxist. Many others, with varying degrees of pacifism, simply reject what they see as the Bush administration's plans for global hegemony. It was this wing of the antiwar movement that organized the stunning worldwide demonstrations of last month, the largest in history. A great many ordinary people also joined in, however, out of plain revulsion against Bush's Iraq policy.

This movement continues to mount large-scale protests, most of them peaceful. Relatively small numbers of nonviolent demonstrators have gotten themselves arrested in scattered sit-ins around the country. These protests could swell.

One of the largest peaceful antiwar groups, MoveOn.org, is organizing a massive e-mail drive to enlist signatures for a citizens' declaration, which reads in its entirety: "As a US-led invasion of Iraq begins, we, the undersigned citizens of many countries, reaffirm our commitment to addressing international conflicts through the rule of law and the United Nations. By joining together across countries and continents, we have emerged as a new force for peace. As we grieve for the victims of this war, we pledge to redouble our efforts to put an end to the Bush Administration's doctrine of pre-emptive attack and the reckless use of military power." And here is where the two antiwar movements overlap. The sentiments in that statement could be endorsed by much of the American foreign policy establishment. The second face of the antiwar movement is entirely non-radical, pragmatically opposed to the administration's doctrine of preemptive war and alarmed at its contempt for diplomacy. We might call this the "realist" antiwar movement, after the realist school of foreign policy.

Interestingly, while it had echoes in street demonstrations, the prolonged debate about whether to go to war was conducted entirely within the American mainstream. The realist foreign policy school is not opposed to the use of military power. But it values international institutions and international law, not for reasons of idealism but out of plain self-interest. James Fallows, writing in the Atlantic Monthly last November, used extensive interviews to show that many foreign policy hawks are alarmed by the administration's views on preemption and unilateralism. From this viewpoint, Defense Secretary Donald

H. Rumsfeld, his deputy, Paul Wolfowitz, Vice President Cheney et al. are the radicals. They just happen to be running the U.S. government.

As realist critics John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt wrote in the journal *Foreign Policy* in January, "Both logic and historical evidence suggest a policy of vigilant containment would work, both now and in the event Iraq acquires a nuclear arsenal. Why? Because the United States and its regional allies are far stronger than Iraq. And because it does not take a genius to figure out what would happen if Iraq tried to use weapons of mass destruction to blackmail its neighbors, expand its territory, or attack another state directly."

"The war includes its aftermath," says Jessica Tuchman Mathews, president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, another leading antiwar realist. According to Mathews, the challenge now is to "repair the damage that has been done to Atlantic, bilateral and international institutions and relationships. The key question for the American people . . . is: Do we want to run an empire and behave like an imperial power?"

How convincing the realist critique turns out to be, of course, will depend both on the war and its aftermath. Most realist critics emphasize:

- the damage to international institutions and alliances that the United States particularly needs in an era of global terrorism and nuclear proliferation;
- the plain unreality of the assumption that unleashing a war of "shock and awe" will either build stable democracies or tilt the regional balance of power in the Middle East in America's favor and increase the odds of an Israel-Palestine settlement;
- the engendering of anti-American feeling among both America's friends and adversaries;
- and the diversion of attention from homeland security and other important domestic issues.

Robert Borosage, of the liberal Campaign for America's Future, observed, "It's astonishing that Republicans in Congress supported a budget resolution with massive tax cuts the very week that America went to war, and they let the administration refuse to even estimate the costs of war or occupation. With domestic programs being slashed, this will be a huge issue."

Both antiwar movements do face big hurdles, on two fronts. First, most Americans support their president and their troops while a war is being waged. If the war is won quickly, and if any weapons of mass destruction are found or used against us, it will be taken as vindication for the president's policy. And if other foreign-policy or terrorist crises worsen, it will be difficult to sort out whether this is proof of the need for Bush-style toughness -- or the result of needlessly stirring up a hornets' nest.

Second, once the shooting stops, the administration is likely to invite the U.N. back in, to help clean up the mess. This will be defined as a new multilateralism and a new test of the U.N.'s relevance. Antiwar critics will be torn between welcoming a chance for the U.N. to play a renewed role and resisting a vindication of Bush's policies.

Yet even if the war is over quickly, the Bush administration will be under tremendous pressure from forces at home and abroad to repudiate unilateralism and preemptive war. It's also worth recalling that every American president in this century who has led a war -- even successful ones with clean aftermaths -- has seen his party rejected at the polls not long afterward, most recently Bush's father. And this war's aftermath is likely to be messier than most.

Comparisons with Vietnam protest are tricky. With few exceptions, it was only after the Vietnam War became a quagmire that radical critics were joined by realist ones. This time, the process has been telescoped; the war itself may go smoothly, but there will be a continuing broad-based challenge to the administration's conception of America's role in the world.

The magazine that I edit, the American Prospect, supported the invasion of Afghanistan and opposed the administration's Iraq policy and its wider doctrine. As a forum for foreign policy realists, I suspect we speak for a lot of Americans. After the battlefield smoke clears and the collateral damage becomes apparent, a mainstream movement opposed to future Iraq wars and supportive of multilateralism is only likely to grow.

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