

The San Diego Union-Tribune.

FRIDAY
MARCH 21, 2003

Peace through war: Orwell revisited

By Gary Fields

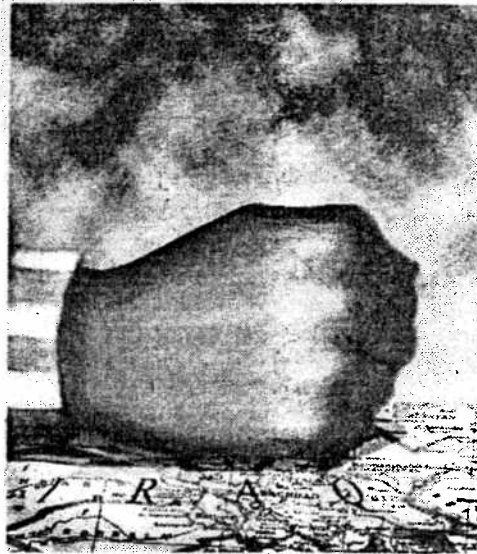
If truth is indeed the first casualty of war, it is equally obvious that the route leading to the U.S. military attack on Iraq now commencing suffers from the same pathology.

George Orwell in his foreboding novel, "1984," coined the term newspeak to describe a language of deception used by a future totalitarian government to subvert democracy and create support for a permanent state of war among its citizens. Orwell's bleak picture of a totalitarian future, nurtured on the power of propaganda, could not be more appropriate in describing the pathway to the current situation.

What we have experienced over the past year is the political equivalent of what economists term, a "market failure," a failing of democracy in which truth has been subverted. How did the administration arrive at this moment?

The Preamble to the U.N. Charter states as one of its primary aims, the protection of future generations "against the scourge of war." In his recent admonitions to the world community, President George W. Bush advanced the claim that the United Nations, to remain "relevant," had to approve a resolution supporting a war to disarm Iraq. War is thus the path to peace while peaceful means to control the Iraqi regime through weapons inspections emerged as the route to appeasement and terror. Orwell's classic is filled with examples of such linguistic leaps of logic.

Furthermore, the Bush administration argued that the United States needed to initiate a war against Iraq to protect the American people from an Iraqi-initiated terrorist attack. What Bush neglected to mention to the American public in his exhortations to war, is that the CIA itself, in its report of last Octo-



Jon Krause

ber on Iraq and in a letter to Sen. Bob Graham, D-Fla., assessed the probability of such an attack to be "very low."

The CIA further concluded that only if attacked, would Iraq pose a serious threat to use so-called weapons of mass destruction against American interests. In effect, it is the Bush administration's bellicosity toward Iraq that becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy in which the Iraqi regime, pushed into war, eventually emerges as the belligerent it was characterized to be.

The Bush team repeatedly emphasized that both diplomacy and inspections failed to contain Saddam Hussein. How did the administration make this case? Simply by repeating, with all evidence to the contrary, that diplomacy and inspection failed.

Again, Orwell's work is replete with examples of how the totalitarian rulers of "1984" resort to simple repetition of propaganda statements to garner support for their policies. The fact is, after 12 years of sanctions, Iraq is an impoverished and exhausted society, its military, as both the Pentagon and CIA acknowledge, a shell of what it was in 1991 when it was crushed by the campaign to expel it from Kuwait.

Bush now makes reference to his "coali-

tion" to disarm Saddam Hussein, an assortment of some 30-odd nations supposedly in favor of the U.S.-led war. He fails to mention that the overwhelming majority of the world's nations oppose what this "coalition" has unleashed. During the past three months, as millions of people around the world took to protesting the idea of a preemptive attack against Iraq, the administration ignored the protests, denigrating them as "focus groups," illegitimate for the making of foreign policy.

For its part, the U.S. Congress made it much easier for the Bush administration to sidestep the democratic process in its relentless campaign of disinformation to convince the American people and world public opinion of the need for war. So extraordinary was this relinquishment of power that Sen. Robert Byrd, D-W.Va., in impressing upon his colleagues the need for serious debate on the question of war, observed incredulously how, on this the most critical policy issue facing any government, the hallowed chamber of the U.S. Senate remained "eerily silent."

It is in this democratic vacuum that roughly 140 cities across the U.S. passed resolutions against the war. As a City Council member from Los Angeles insisted: "We're debating this issue because those we have elected to debate this issue have abdicated." There is no precedent for such public expression in anticipation of war.

Sadly, the Bush administration ignored this outpouring of democracy. In truth, this war is not about weapons or terrorism, although the attacks of Sept. 11 certainly provided the enabling backdrop for such an enterprise.

It is about remaking the Middle East and the rest of the world according to a vision articulated 10 years ago by such figures as Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle. It is about the United States committing itself to military action as a solution to the world's problems regardless of world public opinion. It is about the arrogance of empire. It is about the folly of peace through war. It marks a sordid chapter in this nation's history — when truth and democracy became sacrificed to the destructive ambitions of a select few.

Fields is a professor in the Department of Communication at the University of California San Diego. His coming book, "Territories of Profit," examines economic empire-building and globalization.