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## **A War We All Will Regret**

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*Klassekampen*

Every day since March 20, when U.S. forces invaded Iraq, I have greeted each new day with intense sadness, given the arrogant, ignorant face that my country presents to the world. Benjamin Franklin once said: "What's begun in anger ends in shame." We will regret this war: its cost in human lives, ours and theirs, its damage to our fiscal affairs, as well as the ruination of goodwill toward the United States around the world.

This is not to say that I would rather live in Iraq -- witness what was done to the Kurds on Saddam's orders. I realize, however, that the United States is hardly blameless in history when the issue is genocide. The United States sold Iraq the chemicals that were used against the Kurds back when it was allied with Saddam against the ayatollahs of Iran.

I live in an urban area named after indigenous peoples who, a century and a half ago, owned and occupied the land on which I now live. Their dispossession was not a pretty story. The United States has been an imperial power for much of its history -- witness not only the capture of the continent that now comprises our territory, but also our frequent interference with the affairs of other nations. "Regime change" is nothing new; witness, for example, Chile under the leadership of Salvador Allende in 1973. I could fill a book with examples.

Even against such a background, the imperial arrogance of U.S. policy has very rarely been as bald and bloody as it is today, against Iraq. Our society also is divided as during the Vietnam war 35 years ago. That war was undertaken to contain international communism, a fact that my students today look up in history books now that the Soviet Union is a sociopolitical artifact as Vietnam hosts tourists and manufactures Nike athletic shoes for export. One wonders how we will explain the war with Iraq to our grandchildren 35 years from now. Will we tell them that this is what happens when the most powerful man in the world has a temper tantrum?

President Bush's obsession with Saddam Hussein resembles paranoid schizophrenia, the fear that someone is out to get us (paranoia) and the belief that only we can save the world (grandiosity). Bush, a rehabilitated alcoholic, is behaving in a way that students of alcoholism call a "dry drunk," exaggerated self-importance and pomposity, grandiose behavior, a rigid, judgmental outlook, impatience, childish and irresponsible behavior, irrational rationalization, projection and overreaction. A small but very powerful minority among Bush's advisors advocates a state of war that may continue until they are removed from power. It is being said in those circles that everyone wants to go to Baghdad, but "real men" want to go to Tehran.

The president of the United States possesses more power than any other individual on Earth to focus attention on one issue. The second day of the war, the first 12 pages of the *Omaha World-Herald*, our only local daily newspaper (which supports the war very strongly) were devoted to news from the battle front; on the next page was a tiny story describing how the number of smoggy days in the U.S. had risen 32 per cent in one year. The next day, the first 14 pages of the same newspaper were devoted to the war. On the next page after that was a tiny piece describing how the federal budget deficit was higher than ever before -- U.S. \$96 billion in February alone.

The same newspaper editorialized that war was being waged for peace. George Orwell should have seen that one.

Our state universities and public schools are facing drastic cuts. Holes in Omaha's streets are not being paved, and our local libraries are now closed several days a week while our government spends billions of dollars per month on war in Iraq.

While President Bush, a born-again Christian, leads us back to the days of the Crusades, very few policymakers are addressing the very real issues of the 21st century, including toxic pollution by chemicals (especially in the Arctic), global warming, and others. What of the U.S. role in the world *vis a vis* the Kyoto Protocol, the International Criminal Court, the anti-ballistic missile treaty, and our role in the United Nations?

A large number of U.S. citizens are very worried about how the rest of the world looks at us -- is our president no better than a wild cowboy at the controls of a gigantic machine on a wild, heedless ride? In the long run (and very importantly for the entire world), did the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 induce in many U.S. right-wingers the kind of fearful trance that often precedes evolution into a fascist state? The provisions of the U.S. Patriot Act have some of us fearing the gradual demise of our cherished constitutional freedoms. Has George W. Bush, who also often seems entranced, played on these fears to enhance his own power?

Given the winner-take-all nature of the U.S. political system, Bush's commitment to war could cost his job. All he must do be defeated would be to alienate the middle of the spectrum -- 5 to 10 per cent will do -- assuming the Democrats can provide a candidate who will galvanize the opposition. Thus far, however, no meaningful opposition to this insane policy has organized.

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