



PAUL LACHINE

IS WARTIME DISSENT PATRIOTIC?

YES

BY MICHAEL PAUL McCUSKER

Quite often heard lately is the admonition that dissent should be restrained and even prohibited during time of war — that it might be acceptable prior to the start of a war but equivalent to treason once a war has started.

Dissent during wartime is harshly criticized as "aiding and abetting" an enemy. Yet now, when even friends and neighbors disparage dissent, is the essential moment to resist, to question with intelligence and vigorous skepticism the claims of a war's necessity and righteousness, and to protest the curbing of civil liberties that seem corollary to every war.

The primary purpose for dissent in wartime is to discontinue wars inimical to the principles and liberties bedrock to this nation; and to critically scrutinize every stage of a war's conduct.

If there were no dissent the government would not feel compelled to publicly explain or attempt to justify its warmaking nor recognize the civil rights of combatants and citizenry, but instead issue repressive edicts disguised as necessities for the war effort. And even with dissent, government generally stonewalls in reaction to public disquiet which imputations of treachery are unable to fully squelch.

Dissent is especially important when it is realized the reasons for war are misleading or hypocritical, which begs the question: is it truly unpatriotic to condemn lies that are as surely murdering Americans as any proclaimed enemy?

It makes little sense to justify the dead of a war by sending more to also die; nor is it reasonable to curb dissent to war with the rationale it would prolong a war rather than pressure its end.

Dissent in wartime is a necessary antithesis to the magnification of militarism war generates. The public is governed more by military doctrines and less by civic principles — the militant dominance of government and society erodes democracy to such a point that obedience rapidly supplants freedom of thought and expression as permissible patriotism. Wartime is not a time to be submissive or silent — dissent is not a right but an obligation for resolutely demanding veracity and integrity from self-styled war leaders, and scrupulous adherence to constitutional values.

And it might be argued that dissent refutes the claim that an entire society is manifestly responsible for the advent or conduct of a war and policies that lead to it. In a reframing of the concept that all members of a nation are guilty of whatever that nation does on the world scene, the liberties and freedoms within a society such as the USA dispute the contention of universal liability for "total war." In that sense alone, dissent in wartime is our finest beacon.

The arguments on this page are the result of an oral exchange of opinion one Sunday afternoon in Godfather's Books & Espresso in Astoria. This paper exchange of opinion has already been published in the Daily Astorian, on July 2, which ironically was the day Congress declared colonial rupture from its mother country in 1776.

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NO

BY E. ROBERT NASSIKAS

Americans have always held that dissent in any form, particularly against a prevailing government, is their birthright. Indeed, any time a person is criticized for dissenting against the government, for whatever reason, that person figuratively pulls out the Constitution and points out that "freedom of speech" is a right that our forefathers suffered untold miseries to guarantee to all Americans and which thousands of men died on battlefields to preserve. One of the oldest examples of voicing an exception to that freedom, of course, is shouting "fire" in a crowded theater. Yes, that would be an exception because the resulting panic would undoubtedly kill many of the people in the theater.

Political dissent has become quite fashionable since the Vietnam War as thousands upon thousands of Americans took to the streets, even the streets of London in the person of ex-President Clinton, to protest in various ways our involvement in that war. It's been shown by many official observers and actual participants that public dissent actually prolonged the fighting and thus resulted in the deaths and maiming of thousands of U.S. troops.

That war was not lost in Vietnam, it was lost in the streets of Washington, D.C., San Francisco and dozens of other U.S. cities. North Vietnamese General Vo Nguyen Giap stated in 1985 that without the antiwar efforts of such organizations as the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW), of which Senator John Kerry was a member, Hanoi would have surrendered. Retired Major General George S. Patton III, who commanded combat troops in Vietnam, said that by the nature of his wartime protests Kerry gave "aid and comfort to the enemy," as did actress Jane Fonda, popularly known as "Hanoi Jane," who followed in the infamous footsteps of Tokyo Rose and Axis Sally of World War 2, all of them traitors.

Following Kerry's return from Vietnam, he compounded his public street protests by getting himself before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee where he spewed a string of accusations against his former military "brothers," including unbelievable charges of brutality against Vietnamese civilians, prisoners of war, even shooting cattle and dogs just for fun. He did this at the same time our troops were fighting and dying on the battlefields and U.S. prisoners of war were rotting in Vietnamese prisons.

Even now as our military personnel are engaged in life-and-death struggles in Iraq, anti-U.S. demonstrators are protesting in the street while TV networks are displaying them to the enemy. Does anyone wonder how these images are affecting the enemy? There's no doubt that it simply emboldens them and gives them reasons to step up their actions against our soldiers and Marines.

Dissent? Yes, even anti-Americans such as Senator Edward Kennedy and former Klansman Robert Byrd stand up on the floor of the Senate and publicly denounce President Bush's efforts to bring the war to a successful conclusion.

Dissent in a discreet way is acceptable, but certainly not to where it's discernible to the enemy such as Kerry and other hypocritical politicians are guilty of doing. The ballot box is a valid method of dissent. Then, if President Bush is defeated, his successors can do the dishonorable thing and "cut and run."

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