
Interview: Dr. Robert J. Lifton

Many people are not happy about this war

Writing in the London Guardian on March 12, well-known author and psychologist Robert J. Lifton asserted that many Americans have "grave misgivings" about the Bush administration's conduct of the Gulf war, and forecast a "national reassessment" of the entire affair. Dr. Lifton, who is presently Distinguished Professor of Psychiatry and Psychology at the City University of New York, elaborated on these views in an interview with Kathy Klenetsky on March 13. We publish excerpts here:

EIR: You said there will be a "national reassessment" of the war. How will this come about?

Lifton: It's very hard to predict how profound it will be, how extensive it will be. I think there will be some reassessment, and even a measure of revulsion on the part of Americans. There will be further exploration of casualties, especially Iraqi casualties. that will be disturbing to Americans. . . . I don't think the present wave of triumphalism is going to continue without interruption. And I don't think that the enthusiasm and euphoria in relation to the claim of victory is going to last in this form.

EIR: Do you think one of the reasons for this reassessment will be the reality of the U.S. economic collapse?

Lifton: That's quite possible. It could be a combination of that and more information about casualties [and] about why this was really an example of mass slaughter rather than a war. Over time, the war psychology will diminish. . . . I'm the national convenor of a group called the Ad Hoc Committee for Peace, which raised money for a full-page ad in the Feb. 12 and 14 *New York Times*. The heading of the ad was, "Is There Nothing Left But the Killing?" The ad appeared in the middle of the war. To everybody's amazement, we got about a thousand replies from all over the country—an enormous response. My sense from that is that are large numbers of people all over, who have been unhappy and uneasy about the war. So, there's a false picture of monolithic support in the United States.

EIR: Who in Congress is sympathetic to what you're doing?

Lifton: There's a whole group of senators who are at least open to our views. Senator [Paul] Wellstone [D-Minn.], who spoke out against the war; others like Senator [Mark] Hatfield [R-Ore.], and to some extent Senator [Ted] Kennedy [D-

Mass.], have been interested in what we've been doing. There are also a number of people in the House; two people in the House signed our ad—Democrats Major Owens and Charlie Rangel, both black congressmen from New York. There's the Dellums group in Congress. . . .

EIR: Will Bush be a target of this national reassessment?

Lifton: I think so and I would hope so, and I think what we did [in Iraq] has to be questioned very profoundly, and rivals some of what we did in Vietnam.

EIR: What was Bush trying to do when he ordered the shooting of the withdrawing Iraqi troops?

Lifton: Part of what went on was a strange psychological dance between Bush and Saddam Hussein, and a pattern they brought out in each other. Bush behaved like Captain Ahab in *Moby Dick*. He developed an obsession with his version of the White Whale—Saddam Hussein—on which he projected all evil, and then it took on a certain dynamic, which was extended into the annihilation project, including the annihilation, or the destruction, the mass killing, of fleeing Iraqi troops. By that point, Bush had become absolutely intransigent about any peacemaking process, or proposing any peacemaking process. And I think that is scandalous and unworthy of an American statesman.

EIR: When Rep. Henry Gonzalez (D-Tex.) introduced his resolution to impeach George Bush, he used the term "war crimes" to apply to what the U.S. was doing vis-à-vis Iraq. Do you think this is a useful or correct definition?

Lifton: It is a difficult political direction to pursue, but, on the other hand, there is considerable justification for the claim of American war crimes. And that has to do with bombing civilians, and destroying the infrastructure of cities, water supply, electricity, really the life-sustaining structures of a city, which I think could be seen as war crimes, and certainly brought about undoubtedly many, many deaths. And that's why counting victims, identifying victims, becomes extremely important.

EIR: Doesn't the use of the term war crimes impute a certain deliberate brutality on Bush's part?

Lifton: There's an area which we have intentionally kept fuzzy that has to do with primary and secondary military targets. The claimed logic of the Pentagon goes something like this: We only bomb military targets. But, we bomb not only primary military targets, but also secondary military targets. But what are secondary military targets? Those are targets which have to do with communications, with anything that may indirectly support, or lend some support, to the Iraqi military. By the time you get to secondary military targets, especially in a very small country which had absolutely no air opposition to us, you're bombing civilians extensively, and you're destroying civilian lives directly and indirectly.

So I think that has to be evaluated in relation to war crimes.

EIR: How about the Pentagon's admitted disinformation about the size of the Iraqi war machine?

Lifton: That should be looked into also, because the whole Iraqi war machine was built up as a vast monolith, or as a vastly effective war machine, which required half a million Americans to be sent there. . . . The disinformation about the Iraqi war machine was part of the drumbeating for American warmaking.

EIR: In terms of Bush's psychological state, what would bring him to wage this kind of war?

Lifton: There's an obsession in this country with doing profiles on Saddam Hussein. And it's useful sometimes, because personality can matter in relation to leadership and warmaking. But the way it's been done has been a kind of walled-off demonization of Saddam Hussein, and you can't understand the war, unless you have a double profile of Saddam and Bush. In both cases, you want to ask about individual psychology, ideology, and relationship to history and culture. You would want to stress in Saddam not just his having been beaten as a child, but also his ardent nationalism—his extreme nationalism—as part of the Baathist movement. And his relationship to a kind of collective Arab Mideastern rage toward the West, that stems from Western colonialism and Western domination, extending through American influence in the Middle East.

[In Bush's case], you'd look at his individual psychology, but also his ideology, which has to do with American hegemony and a certain kind of American elitism, and his relationship to culture and history, his vision of himself as having a great moment on the world stage in relationship to this war, and as probably buttressing American power at a time when it's been threatened, American influence in the world, and at a time when there are grave problems at home, in the cities, in the economy, and in other areas. . . .

EIR: You talked in the *Guardian* about the effect of the war on the American psyche. Does it make Americans more inured toward human suffering at home?

Lifton: One of the goals, consciously or preconsciously, in promoting this triumphalism, is to help people forget about terrible human problems like homelessness, and the collapse of our cities, drugs, violence and poverty. As one maximizes triumphalism and militarism, one is likely to diminish and minimize one's commitment to dealing with dire social problems.

EIR: Do you see any connection between Bush's mentality on the war and his big push now for the death penalty?

Lifton: There's a whole mentality Bush is promoting that is vastly unhealthy for all of us and harmful to our polity and to our people. It has to do with militarism, American hegemony in the Third World, and a punitive approach to American problems, rather than a compassionate one.

Bush claims 'victory' in phony war on drugs

by Jeffrey Steinberg

The Bush administration has just released two annual reports on the so-called war on drugs, which represent a total whitewash of the true state of affairs.

The first report, dated February 1991, is the third annual National Drug Control Strategy, a document signed by President Bush and prepared by the White House drug czar. The report is a shameless collection of doctored statistics which proclaim virtual "victory" in a war on drugs that has been a joke—even by Washington standards. While claiming that the past two years saw sharp cutbacks in drug use by Americans—surpassing all goals set out in previous Drug Control Strategy reports—the White House document failed to provide any data whatsoever on the two crucial indicators: total availability of drugs and levels of domestic marijuana production. In both these critical categories, the White House claimed that "data were not yet available."

No data?

On Feb. 8, *EIR* published a cover story titled, "Where are the sorties against U.S. pot fields, Mr. Bush?" which documented the fact that in 1989, marijuana was the number one cash crop in America, bringing in over \$50 billion in profits to Dope, Inc. In 37 states, marijuana brought in more cash than the leading legitimate crops.

Despite the fact that these statistics were compiled from public sources, the Bush White House report claimed that no data were available. Had the pot statistics been published, the fraud of the Bush administration's war on drugs would have been exposed for all to see.

Another lie peddled in the new report is that hospital emergency room incidents of drug overdoses and drug-related injuries and deaths are down 18% since 1989. According to several federal drug enforcement professionals interviewed by this magazine, *the only decline is in the reporting procedures.* The Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN), a federally funded program for accumulating data from hospital emergency rooms, has experienced a 30% falloff in personnel and reporting rates in the past year, due to massive budget cutbacks. The system is in such a shambles that the government has decided to shift over from a system of