

# Post-war mood in US

WASHINGTON is in a no-compromising, no-nonsense, rather ebullient, even festive mood.

This is not to say it is a mood that will last, nor even a mood fully justifiable in view of the seemingly inevitable problems ahead both at home and abroad. But it is the reality of the moment and much will flow from it for good or bad.

Contrary to many expectations, George Bush has managed to pretty much neutralise his political opposition -- both the Democratic Party and the amorphous, confused "peace movement" -- and to take the country along with him in a significantly united way to a war that has liberated Kuwait and altered Mid-east history. However, the full history of this period remains to be dispassionately assessed at times removed from the tension and turmoil of contemporary events.

But at this particular moment in history the magnitude of the military success coupled with such substantial public backing at home has put Bush in the driver's seat far more than was anticipated even by Bush's backers just a few months ago.

It wasn't that long ago, many now seem to be forgetting, that Bush's presidency seemed in considerable trouble; his standing in the polls considerably reduced; the economic problems of recession, budget crisis, and Savings and Loans scandal all taking a considerable toll.

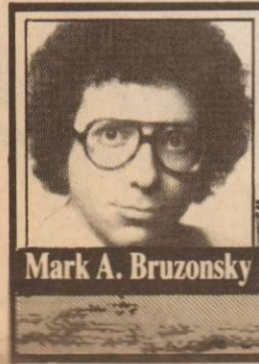
But a kind of war fever has caught on here and many Americans, maybe most, are now cheering their military heroes and in favour of pushing on to bring down Saddam Hussein and even bring him to trial as a war criminal.

Public sentiments have grown so hawkish, in fact, that widely-recognised regional expert Robin Wright -- currently

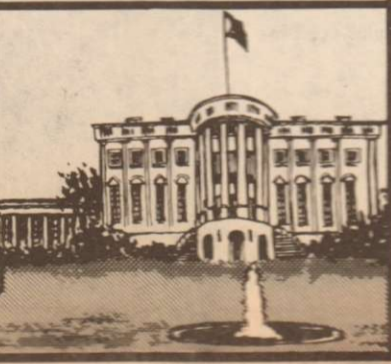
*If the US pushes too hard this could play into Saddam's hands....Let the Iraqi people exorcise their own demons.*

-- Arab-American journalist **Hisham Melham** on PBS MacNeil-Lehrer -- February 27

## From



Mark A. Bruzonsky



## Washington

a staff writer for the *Los Angeles Times* -- has been publicly warning that too firm an American hand could be counterproductive and dangerous in the longer run.

A few evenings ago on the increasingly popular *Larry King Live* Cable News Network talk show, Wright drew an analogy with the end of World War I when Germany was assessed heavy reparations which within a few decades backfired and led to World War II.

Other journalists, especially those from the Arab World including Hisham Melham and Raghida Dergham have made similar points in recent days on popular American TV programmes.

The same evening President Bush spoke to declare victory and call for final negotiations based on UN Security Council resolutions when an interesting alliance came together to force-

fully oppose the idea of going after Saddam Hussein and putting him in the legal dock.

While interviewing Republican Senator John Heinz who is proposing Congressional legislation aimed at bringing Saddam Hussein to trial as a war criminal, both hosts of the CNN *Crossfire* interview programme surprisingly opposed the idea.

Former Reagan White House official Patrick Buchanan repeatedly argued that such a trial would give Saddam Hussein an unprecedented forum "for telling his side of the story", a historic platform that would last over a period of weeks on international television and would be very politically confusing and dangerous.

And what about Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982, Buchanan asked Heinz; and for that matter Israel's brutal treatment of the Palestinians that even some Israelis have likened

to pogroms and war crimes?

Buchanan, a conservative Republican, who a few months ago when Bush was way down in the polls, was being touted by some as a Rightwing alternative in 1992, was joined in his concerns by maverick liberal Republican Pete McCloskey. "Let's not move to war crimes," McCloskey pleaded, insisting that we shouldn't be telling another country how to deal with its own leaders.

And joining the chorus suggesting that America might be pushing too far if pursuit of toppling Saddam Hussein and bringing him to trial now became clear US policy was also *New Republic* editor Michael Kinsley.

There can be no doubt that Iraq has been defeated both militarily and psychologically; that its infrastructure and future military capacity are substantially destroyed.

There can be no doubt that Saddam Hussein massively miscalculated the power at his disposal and the likely actions of others. Whatever Saddam's visions and calculations back in August, his country has suffered tremendously as a result.

And there can be no doubt any longer that a very major realignment of political and economic forces, as well as military power, in the region has now resulted from the Iraqi decision to attempt to annex Kuwait.

And yet it remains too early, it seems to me, to know for sure just what kind of aftershocks will follow the historic events of recent months. We have just lived through a massive geopolitical earthquake; but it's too soon to know just what aftershocks are still to come.

True enough, at this historic moment there are major new political opportunities now that Mid-eastern issues are front and centre on the world stage.