

Response to the Gulf War

By David Chandler

[Printed as a letter to the Editor, The Daily Bulletin, Upland, CA. Suha Lee taught mathematics with me at Montclair High School. She is a Palestinian-American born in Iraq. Her sensitivity to the Gulf War made the human tragedy real and for me and underlined the callousness of our policy toward the people of Iraq.]

Suha Lee wrote a Letter to the Editor several weeks ago to give an Arab-American's perspective on the Persian Gulf War. Suha recently showed me a copy of her original letter to compare with the published version. Only four sentences were edited out, but they appear to have been selectively omitted because of the ideas and feelings they expressed rather than their appropriateness, their style or the overall length of the letter.

The printed version says, "Saddam Hussein started this conflict, but we are the ones who escalated it." Suha's original continues, "We chose war as the means of solving this conflict. We are destroying Iraq because we choose to, because the calendar says it is time."

Further on the printed version says, "When it's all over, the loss of life will be tragic, but the loss of trust will be even more tragic." Suha's original continues, "How long will it be before our country will do this again--just pick up its guns and go destroy someone else? How long will it be before our country will choose war to resolve another conflict?"

The questions omitted are important ones. Why did George Bush choose a course of action that would inevitably lead to massive slaughter rather than seek a resolution of the conflict by peaceful means? With the war now over the questions Suha posed are all the more pertinent. Upon kicking the "Vietnam Syndrome" are we now embarking upon a new militaristic phase of our history?

The questions are equally significant in that they were apparently censored. Must the American people be sheltered from opinions that challenge our myths? Is it the role of the press to help forge consensus, or the appearance of consensus, by silencing alternative views?

"How long will it be before our country will choose war to resolve another conflict?" This war showed what we can do. The question that it leaves unanswered is who we are.