

# The Pentagon presents the bloodless, nonviolent war

By DENI ELLIOTT

People who abhor television violence can't complain about media coverage of the Persian Gulf war, to date. What's not to like? This is Desert Storm: the prime-time war, the electronic war, the bloodless war, the carefully choreographed war.

More style than substance, the networks have produced a Middle East mini-series, complete with logos and music. They have given us a docudrama when what we have needed is a documentary.

President Bush wrote his declaration-of-war speech weeks in advance; the network scripts were equally well prepared. Together, military and media counted down the days to air time.

From the first reports of U.S. bombing, graphics and video-game-style markers have spun and splashed across the screen. The slick visuals have made it all too easy to ignore that all we've gotten in these first days of war coverage is speculation from retired military leaders, self-serving reports from all governments involved and nothing of substance from the

*The new mini-series is suitable for family viewing with music and sick visuals. But what is the real cost in lives?*

reporting pool.

Before the war began, some journalists worried that the military might try to turn the news media into their public relations team. So far, the networks appear to be more than willing converts.

Journalists aren't totally to blame for not being able to separate all the truth from the hype. Rarely has a war boasted so many media censors, representing so many countries and so many separate political agendas. It's not the media's fault that available video shows happy pilots and state-of-the-art technology rather than carnage.

But those covering the Persian Gulf do have a choice in deciding whether to concentrate on battle "happy talk" or the uncertainties of war and the certainties of cost. So far, they appear to have chosen the former, splitting together military lingo, sports metaphors and high-tech graphics to create their news reports. And U.S. military leaders have been all too happy to respond to media requests for feature stories on expensive technology developed during the Reagan years.

According to early public opinion polls, which reflect what the public "sees" on the tube, this made-for-television war is a hit. Reporters could better serve American interests, if instead of gasping in appreciation of the computer-assisted accuracy of these new weapons, they asked questions about costs and choices. If U.S. taxpayers are paying up to \$1 billion a day to fight this war, they have a right to know how the decisions to spend their money are being made.

And, rather than adopting military euphemisms as their own, journalists could force military personnel to explain what the jargon really means.

It is deceptively clean to report that the United States is successfully "decimating Iraqi troops." Aside from the distorted use of deicide, the use hides the idea that real people are killing other real people. Why don't journalists ask for clarification when military personnel talk about "collateral damage"? If those interviewed won't say directly that innocent people are being killed or hurt, the journalists better translate.

"Surgical strikes in the theater of operations" may be the most antiseptic way to fight a war, but shouldn't news media remind their audiences that a medical analogy is not quite accurate? These bombing missions destroy governmental buildings. Would we be appreciative if some country bombed the Pentagon, however carefully? Stealth fighters fly sorties. Patriot missiles intercept the incoming. The meta-sports provide the excitement of a televised sports event, complete with instant replays.

Everyone talks about the big game. A soldier interviewed by one of the networks complains about pacing the sidelines in the states while his buddies are out on the field. "It's kind of like playing the Super Bowl."

he said, "and our side's winning."

A New York anchor thanks his Middle East correspondent for "ceiling the play-by-play on this thing." Another network anchor asks officials to comment on what we can expect "now that Desert Storm has kicked off."

But, Desert Storm is no sports game, and American journalists are not covering their winning hometown team.

This is war — a war that is causing death to real people, destruction of real buildings and an all-too-real debt the United States will carry for generations. The news media may be right in deciding (after a short while) to sandwich the war coverage between commercials. Viewers then are forced to recognize that it costs a lot to cover this war.

The networks should be more diligent in reminding viewers that fighting has even higher costs than covering it. A commercial break would be an appropriate time to tell viewers that they are the sponsors of this war, as well as the spectators.

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## A single-room-occupancy residence is a home — it is not a shelter

By JOAN E. DAWSON and STEPHEN F. BLAU

The sign said "No More Shelter." It was a red sign. An angry sign. A sign that insisted enough is enough. Upon seeing it, a member of the Project HOME advisory board turned and asked, only half-jokingly, "I wonder which side she's on?"

That was several weeks ago at a city Zoning Board hearing on a proposed 48-room facility for homeless people in the 1500 block of Fairmount Avenue. The hearing was on the validity of the building permits, which had been challenged by two community organizations.

Opponents of Project HOME (Housing, Opportunities, Medical Care, Education) insist on calling it a shelter. We keep trying to explain that it's not. It's actually two steps above a shelter and is known as an SRO (for

single-room occupancy). It's similar to a rooming house and it's designed to be a permanent home for chronically homeless people.

The Zoning Board hearing was just the latest round in a controversy that epitomizes the difficult choices in trying to address the problems of the city's homeless. And, like most controversies, it was the result of misunderstandings and clashing agendas. It's been enormously discouraging to watch community leaders — elected or otherwise — invest so much time and energy in preventing 48 formerly homeless people from residing on the upper two floors of a vacant four-story furni-

*Project HOME wants to build a home for 48 homeless people — but it's drawing flak.*

ture warehouse. Last summer, several weeks after the SRO's antagonists began circulating petitions and letters decrying the new facility, some Project HOME supporters were summoned to a meeting with community representatives where we were told that, without their blessing, Project HOME would not become a reality on Fairmount Avenue.

And they weren't about to give their blessing. We explained that we had already received the approvals and funding commitments required for the development. And because the property was appropriately zoned commercial, Project HOME was simply exercising

its rights to do so.

already issued. They insisted that, because the property is zoned for commercial use, a variance is required for residential use. (Though, in another recent zoning case, they successfully claimed just the opposite.)

Project HOME's opponents have used a number of arguments to pursue their concerns. They've accused the SRO's proponents of poor planning and of failing to recognize that their neighborhood is being overrun by social service facilities. To the contrary, when reviewing potential locations, we relied upon a study issued by the city's Planning Commission. This report, entitled "Areas Where the Development of Community-Based Residential Facilities is Not Recommended," does not list this neighborhood as an impact area.

The project's detractors also have insisted that their neighborhood is doing more than its fair share with

Fairmount Avenue as a commercial center for the neighborhood. To the contrary, the residential units will be contained within the third and fourth floors of the building. Office and commercial tenants are being pursued for the first two floors.

Fortunately, not everyone in the neighborhood objects to Project HOME. We have received a great deal of support and encouragement from a broad cross-section of residents and businesses.

The tactics that our opponents are using have been designed to confuse and intimidate. One local business owner, who was privately effusive in his support for the development, was publicly endorsed the facility.

The validity of the permits is under review by the Zoning Board of Adjustments. Its decision will, in all likelihood, be appealed, no matter the outcome. The project will be de-

ferred to the city's Planning Commission. This report, entitled "Areas Where the Development of Community-Based Residential Facilities is Not Recommended," does not list this neighborhood as an impact area.

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