

A Time for Reflection

We are getting ready to enjoy another holiday season. But this year, it is going to be different. Once again, we are at war in a far away unfriendly foreign land. It was a mere 3 decades ago that we were mired in Vietnam. I wonder how so many could have such short memories.

September 11 is my only child's birthday. She turned 18 on "9/11", welcomed to adulthood with the harsh reminder that adults can unleash unimaginable brutality and suffering on young and old alike. One precious wish I have for my daughter and her children is that they be spared of another "9/11", anywhere in the world.

The war in Iraq appears to be based on an ideology that appears to shift like the sand dunes of the Arabian desert. First, it was to protect us from WMD, an acronym that has now become as familiar as FYI or OK. Then, the war became a humanitarian effort - liberation of an oppressed people. Did they want to be "liberated"? We must also ask: What are the selection criteria for liberation, since we cannot free the hundreds of millions of oppressed men, women and children on this planet?.

I freely admit that terrorism scares me. However, the war in Iraq will not reduce the threat of terrorism, as some have argued. We will not be able to establish a lasting democracy in Iraq - just look at the history. It frightens me, more than terrorist acts, when supporters of the war characterize those who oppose it as "unpatriotic". Our "preemptive strike" doctrine has alienated most of our friends in the international community. How can we "stay the course" when it requires squandering hundreds of young lives and hundreds of billions of dollars to rebuild Iraq, a suspect cause. It was such obstinate behavior that kept us long in Vietnam while the country hemorrhaged daily. I do admit that we need to clean up our mess. We have the proverbial tiger by its tail and need to work with the United Nations and our allies to develop an honorable exit strategy. We cannot do it alone. Hurry, please.

"Charity begins at home", I recall reading when I was in high school. I applaud the efforts made by those in charge to make America safer. Remain vigilant (use those color coded alerts, if you must) in post "9/11". But now, we must not ignore internal issues that threaten our way of life more than any terrorist can. Here are some (order of significance is reader-dependent) of those issues for this holiday season: (1) our K-12 educational system is failing many children (2) our middle class, the backbone of our country, is getting poorer (e.g., 40 million are without precious health insurance) (3) we are increasingly becoming more dependent on foreign oil, scientists and technicians (4) our civil liberties are under attack (5) about half our electorate do not vote (6) a majority of our homeless are war veterans and (7) many elderly have to choose between food and medicine.

Sri Melethil (2003)

