

The Cost of Going Solo

by Swanee Hunt, Scripps Howard News Service, July 16, 2003

The most recent price tag of the U.S. involvement in Iraq is \$50 Billion. The cost per month is now estimated at nearly \$4 billion, substantially higher than original projections. If our cause was for the good of the world, why is the financial burden all on us?

Here are wise words from a straight-shooting President: "The United States has sought to use its preeminent position of power to help other nations recover from the damage and dislocation of the war. We held out a helping hand to enable them to restore their national lives and to regain their positions as independent, self-supporting members of the great family of nations."

These words weren't spoken by George W. Bush but in 1953 by Harry S. Truman. President Truman's sentiments are as valid today as they were 50 years ago-but how quaintly refreshing it now seems to hear a U.S. President referring to the "family of nations."

Whether the scene is Afghanistan, Iraq, or the Middle East, the United States is deeply engaged not only in a war on terrorism, but also in a crucial struggle to build just and lasting peace. Indeed, the outcome of our ongoing campaign against terrorism is largely dependent on how well we do in restoring the "national lives" and economies of these volatile regions. Such restoration is not only time-consuming, ambitious, and expensive, but also perilous. Like other hard choices in life, we can't duck it.

Every day, new reports of violence come from Gaza, Kabul, Monrovia. We are learning the hard way that we need the expertise, troops, and financial contributions of our allies to help us master the intricate challenges of healing and rebuilding societies devastated by war, deprivation and repression. We particularly need the support and mediating skills of the United Nations. At this moment of global peril and opportunity, we must strengthen strained relationships with our traditional allies and must reach out as never before to nations that distrust and even fear us.

Powerful as we are, we can't do it alone.

For four years, as Ambassador to Austria, I managed multiple levels of connections between two countries: political, commercial, environmental, and cultural. I had the privilege not only of representing America overseas, but also of seeing how deeply intertwined our destiny is with the entire global community. It was one of our nation's first and greatest ambassadors, Benjamin Franklin, who admonished leaders of the 13 states: "We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately." Franklin's principle holds equally true in our international relationships today.

Feeling triumphant, congressional leaders not so long ago were calling for punishment of nations that failed to support us in Iraq. The Bush Administration's plans for rebuilding Iraq were deliberately designed to exclude participation by what the White House called the "irrelevant" UN, or by nations such as France and Germany, despite their past roles in humanitarian efforts and in the first Gulf War.

Tough, resourceful military allies who helped us bring peace to the Balkans and now fight to save lives in war-torn Africa have been denounced by U.S. public officials as "cheese-eating surrender monkeys." We, in turn, have refused to be a party to international treaties dealing with children, the environment, and war crimes. In short, our message has been: we're going to do what we want, when we want, and we don't need anyone else's help.

As the number of Americans killed in Iraq continues to rise, as the need for economic aid and logistical support for the Middle East "road map" grows ever more urgent, and as the Taliban re-emerges in the lawless vacuum of postwar Afghanistan, our insistence on unilateral action is fading. It's a welcome change that should be encouraged and supported in the Congress, White House, Defense Department- wherever movers and shakers develop our foreign policy.

During the 2000 campaign, then-Governor Bush said, "If we're an arrogant nation, they'll resent us. If we're a humble nation but strong, they'll welcome us." In his dealings with the global community, President Bush has shown plenty of one kind of U.S. strength-but is he also strong enough to show a more humble spirit of cooperation, credibility and healing?

The U.S. is in the superpower business, but we've alienated most of our international partners. Now we need enlightened leadership from our CEO if we're to rejoin the family of nations-a turn-around expert to pull us out of this downward spiral. Our economy will benefit. The world will benefit. Americans will benefit.