

On My Mind
10/11/02

It doesn't often bother me that I don't have a representative in Congress - be it voting or non-voting. True, there's a bit of regret once in a while, when another of those e-mail petitions comes along, urging me to add my name to the hundreds who are protesting the killing of baby seals or the lack of medicine for African women and children or the burning of PNG or Brazil's forests, and I realize I have no one in Congress to whom to send my protest.

But never has it been as frustrating as it is now, with the President so obstinately determined to force the U.S. Congress, the U.N. Security Council, the other countries of Europe, to sanction a pre-emptive U.S. attack on Iraq, and if that fails, to do it alone, unilaterally - a position that disturbs me greatly and against which I would eagerly sign each and every protesting petition that came my way - if I only had someone to whom to send the record of my concern.

Under other circumstances, targeting Robert Underwood, Guam's non-voting delegate to the Congress, would be a possibility, since Guam and the CNMI's perspectives are often similar, and Underwood often defends the interests of the CNMI along with those of Guam in Congress. But this time that won't work, since Guam, taking a rather insular view, sees the possibility of war - bringing with it more military assigned to Guam - as a boon to its economy, rather than a threat to world peace.

The CNMI is so remote it isn't feasible, either, to join one of the protest marches taking place in some of the larger cities on the mainland or in the rumored million-person march slated for Washington, D.C. this week-end.

Nor, of course, do I have any assurance that when the CNMI does have a non-voting delegate to Washington, he or she would pay any attention to my position, but at least I'd have a specific target for my missives!

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It is all the more frustrating that no one else seems to recognize, or care, that never before in the history of the United States has the U.S. ever attacked another country with so little justification, so little provocation. Bush's view of the U.S. as above and beyond the constraints imposed by a cooperative world order - as evidenced by his rejection of the Rio accords, etc., etc., - is not only ugly and embarrassing and disheartening, but also dangerous.

The United Nations may not be the best, or the ultimate, mechanism for promoting peace and maintaining balance in the world, but at present there is no other. Ignoring and undercutting its tenuous hold on world affairs benefits no one, least of all the U.S. which cannot, after all, survive without the help and cooperation of the rest of the countries of the world. The consequences of the precedent that would be set by Bush's stubborn, single-minded insistence that the U.S. has no choice but to invade Iraq and remove its head of state regardless of whether anyone else in the world agrees are almost too frightening to contemplate.

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Senator Edward M. Kennedy, in a statement released on October 7, points out that President Truman rejected an attack against the Soviet Union at the onset of the Cold War because it would not be consistent with American tradition. Said Truman, "You don't prevent anything by war...except peace."

Again, in 1953, when arguments for a preventive war resurfaced in President Eisenhower's administration, Kennedy says that Eisenhower rejected the idea, noting that even if the U.S. won the war, it would face the vast burdens of occupation and reconstruction that would come with it.

The idea resurfaced again during the Cuban missile crises in 1962, but Robert Kennedy's view, that "For 175 years we have not been that kind of country," prevailed, says Kennedy in his statement.

The issue arose once more, Kennedy says, when American strategists advocated a "preventive" war against China, suspected of acquiring nuclear weapons, and once again, notes Kennedy, those arguments were rejected.

Yet Bush is proposing to attack Iraq - his National Security Strategy claiming that Iraqi threats are so dangerous the U.S. should not hesitate to act alone, if necessary - to exercise its right of self-defense. Kennedy believes, however, that the U.S. can deal with Iraq without going to that extreme - "Earlier generations of Americans rejected preventive war on the grounds of both morality and practicality, and our generation must do so as well, " he says.

Kennedy continues, "Might does not make right. America cannot write its own rules for the modern world. To attempt to do so would be unilateralism run amok. It would antagonize our closest allies....deprive America of the moral legitimacy...to promote our values abroad, and would give other nations...an excuse to violate fundamental principles of civilized international behavior."

Moreover, Kennedy says, such a shift in policy would reinforce the perception of America as a "bully" in the Middle East, and would send a signal to governments around the world that the rules of aggression have changed for them too.

Precisely.

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Short takes:

The newspapers' constant harping on the "losses" suffered by the NMI Retirement Fund are irresponsible, to say the least. Is there any investor in anything other than high-risk securities who is showing a positive balance? The market is down, and therefore, the NMIRF's investments are

down. That's neither surprising nor news, and the papers should stop printing scare headlines about it.

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Arbitrarily cutting off CNMI's graduate student loans seems discriminatory at best. Doesn't the CNMI need doctors, lawyers and engineers and other professionals as much or more than mere college graduates? Wouldn't it have been better to trim everyone's scholarship enough so that all students on loans would receive some support?

Perhaps it's time to evaluate the student loan program in its entirety?

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The NMC Board of Regents recently voted to require a non-refundable \$10,000 application fee from anyone wishing to establish a post-secondary institution in the CNMI. I suppose it's to the CNMI's advantage to require that such fees be non-refundable. But if a venturer's failure to perform is the result of CNMI's own red tape, that doesn't seem quite fair.

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Fiestas for both Rota and Tanapag village's patron saints will be celebrated this week-end. It's a pity some way can't be found to make it easier for people so inclined - not to mention the dignitaries and politicians - to attend both.