

## ***“Echoes of the Heart”***

*Reflections on Life and Community Living*

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**9/11 – five years later.** September 11, 2001 will forever be a *reflection point* in the history of our republic if not, indeed, in the history of our planet. The sordid events of that fateful day, and their consequences, continue to shape our conversation and agenda around the globe.

What’s to be learned? In the immediate aftermath, we learned that the peoples of the world have an inborn sense of compassion and fairness in their spirit. Everywhere, heartfelt expressions of sympathy were announced. People identified with a *wounded* America. *We are all Americans*, said Le Monde.

In this aftermath, with loads of *sympathy capital* coming our way, all sorts of possibilities existed. Possibilities to build coalitions of understanding everywhere, including in the Arab/ Muslim world. Possibilities to build a multi-lateral response to the ghastly terror that had shocked the world and pierced our hearts here at home.

In this context, we must ask ourselves (and, hopefully, this is part of our learning): *How did we get from then* (with sympathy coming to us from everywhere) *to now*, where we are perhaps more scorned and dreaded than at any point in our two-hundred-thirty-year history?

**Losing the moral high ground.** Not accidentally, our demise in the international world began with our fateful, unilateral decision to invade Iraq. Rather than seeking the support of the international community, we disdained the UN (which we should commit to making more strong and vital), turned a cold shoulder to anyone who wasn’t *with us*, and went our own way.

The tragic ends of our *going it alone* ways are evidenced more each day as Iraq (with her internal ethnic/religious strife waiting to be ignited) moves inexorably toward *full-blown* civil war and as the winds of terror cease to abate around the world.

Still, incredibly and amazingly, our leadership continues to languish in denial. Somehow we don’t see what the rest of the world sees. It’s as if our *spin doctors in high places* have created a parallel universe with their own realities and truths, totally disconnected from the harsh reality that is war-ravaged Iraq.

Clearly, both abroad and increasingly at home, we have lost the moral high ground. Not only have we carelessly squandered the *sympathy capital* that was showered upon us five years ago, but our actions and words (notably lacking in humbleness of spirit) have plummeted our popularity and regard around the world.

Perhaps our greatest failure as a nation in these times is our inability (or stubborn resistance) to see our own well-being in light of the well-being of all the nations of the earth. *Going it alone* impulses and policies are simply not adequate for our modern world.

**Making us safe and secure.** Another lesson of 9/11 is that, in spite of our tremendous national wealth and power, at the end of the day, we can't *make* our world safe through military might and arm-twisting diplomacy. In fact, the more we, unilaterally, flex our muscles in the wider world, the less safe we are. Other nations don't naturally warm to a strong-armed superpower.

Terrorists exist in the first place because of their sense of powerlessness and desperation. A center piece of our foreign policy, beyond defending ourselves militarily, should focus on removing the despair while, at the same time, attenuating the powerlessness through dialogue and diplomacy.

We are safer as a nation when we put a human face on rest of the world; when we see the faces of the Muslims/Arabs and therein develop relationships with them. Seeing their faces acknowledges their humanity.

Until we see Arab and Muslim children (all children) as being no less precious than our own, our safety and security are at risk. Putting a face on the other—the other Iraqi, the other Lebanese, the other Iranian—is the first step in reaching for the spiritual high ground. It reminds us that we're all children of the planet, children of the *one* God who is creator of us all.