

EDITORIAL: Striking at the Roots of War

Americans everywhere are concerned about the United States' threats to use military force against Iraq. What can we do to prevent Saddam Hussein from developing weapons of mass destruction and hurting innocent people? Is bombing — and the resultant loss of civilian lives — an acceptable alternative if “all else fails,” as President Clinton says?

To listen to or read the news nowadays is to encounter all manner of argument for and against military action, all in the name of peace and security. Force is necessary to keep rogue states in check and in line with international will, some say. Others say that the lives of Iraqi citizens — “spillage,” according to the Defense Department — are too precious to be sacrificed for such nebulous goals as slowing down Saddam's development of barbaric weapons. (The official U.S. line is that bombing cannot eradicate such weapons, only delay their development.)

Britain, Australia and Canada have publicly supported U.S. plans to use force. Other U.S. allies — Russia, France and China — have come out strongly against military force, pushing for a diplomatic resolution. Kofi Annan, the U.N. secretary-general, has also entered the fray, seeking a peaceful solution through dialogue.

What does Buddhism have to say? Beyond the politics, important points can be reiterated, principles upon which Buddhism and our world peace organization are based.

First, Buddhism values life above all and doesn't condone the taking of human life as the means to any end. War dehumanizes. It allows human beings, the most precious of entities, to become mere cannon fodder at the say-so of politicians who will perhaps never have to experience first-hand the horrors of the wars they initiate.

War stems from the four lowest worlds of Hell, Hunger, Animality and Anger. Opening a path to peace, to a world in which war is no longer an option for civilized people, is one of the main goals of the SGI.

Second, Buddhism seeks to alleviate the root cause of suffering and to provide lasting security. A practical example comes from a story about Shakyamuni. He once addressed the armed factions in a dispute over water rights. Bloodshed seemed inevitable. Shakyamuni said: “Look at those who fight, ready to kill! Fear arises from taking up arms and preparing to strike.”

Commenting on this story, SGI President Ikeda said: “When Shakyamuni finally spoke, he addressed not the rights and wrongs of the immediate conflict but the primal terror of death. He spoke with power and intimacy on overcoming the foremost fear — our own inevitable death — and living a life of peace and security.”

Peace and security do not lie in externals alone, Mr. Ikeda said, but in a “firm inner world, a robust sense of self that will not be swayed or shaken by the most trying of circumstances or pressing adversity. Only when our efforts to reform society have as their point of departure the reformation of the inner life — human revolution — will they lead us with certainty to a world of lasting peace and security.”

As Buddhists, we can pray that decision-makers will weigh heavily the sanctity of all human life, no matter its country of origin, that all those involved will rely on the power of dialogue to solve their differences, and that there will be a peaceful outcome to this crisis.

And there's more we can do. Thoreau wrote, “For every thousand hacking at the branches of evil there is one striking at the root.” Crises like the one now in Iraq point to the importance of a movement like the SGI's, which seeks to implant respect for human life in every human being.

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From President Ikeda's efforts at international dialogue to all SGI members' equally important work to build a network of friends wherever they are — this is the work that strikes at the roots of war.

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