

Between Two Worlds

Reflections on a War

By Dr. Nabil S. Mikhail, Maryland

The third gulf war started in Iraq less than four weeks ago. Every day there were new developments. We do not know future developments including what the war will make of Iraq or the Middle East. Examining parallels with previous wars will help understand current events and future possibilities.

The October 1973 War

Israel was surprised by the Egyptian-Syrian attack. The Americans and British were surprised by the Iraqi resistance. Crossing the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers and waterways in the Gulf War resembles the Egyptians crossing of the Suez Canal. An airlift operation helped the Israelis recover their early losses. America had to send more troops to fight in Iraq. The October War witnessed huge tank battles. American-British tanks fought the Iraqi Army in Baghdad and other cities. The Iraqis have probably used the shoulder-bearing anti-tank RBG missiles, the type of weapons the Egyptian excelled in using during that war. The Egyptian Chief of Staff General Saad al-Shazli was responsible for dispatching Special Forces near the Straits in the middle of Sinai, in attacks that failed. Either Iraq or the U.S. used Special Forces for very sensitive missions during the fighting. Egypt also fired the medium-range *al-Kaher* and *al-Zafer* missiles. The U.S. has used almost half of its cruise missiles inventory of Cruise missiles. Iraq targeted Kuwait, and some southern Iraqi cities to inflict damage on American troops and prevent them from controlling southern Iraq. By October 14-16, the Egyptians debated to move further eastward in Sinai. America deliberated a pause in the dash toward Baghdad.

The 5 June 1967 War

President Nasser asked the U.N. peace keepers stationed in Sinai to leave, an act Israel considered a cause for war. Egypt miscalculated its steps. It insisted Israel would attack Syria despite the affirmation by many sides including the Egyptian Chief of Staff General Muhammad Fawzi that there were no Israeli troops massing on the Israeli-Syrian borders. Egypt judged Israel by its intentions and not actions. Nasser thought a war with Israel in 1967 would be similar to the 1956 war. He would lose militarily but win diplomatically. In some respects, George W. Bush acted like Nasser in June 1967. He wanted the U.N. weapons monitors to leave Iraq. He judged the Iraqi regime not by its actions but by its intentions. In his decision to attack Baghdad, he and his advisers brought an image from the past namely the Gulf War of 1990-1991 and other quick victories in foreign wars in the 1990s.

The Vietnam War

America went to Indo-China to ensure the stability of Southeast Asia, and abort the advent of Communism. In Iraq, America is trying to redraw the geo-strategic perimeter of the Persian Gulf area and Southwest Asia. Saigon, America's ally in Asia fell to the Communist *Vietcong* in April 1975. The whole logic of détente collapsed. Both McNamara and Rumsfeld displayed similar qualities as Secretaries of Defense. Both championed modern technology and its impact on the outcomes of war. Both were fascinated by Special Operation Forces. Both reduced strategy and battles to quantitative formulas. McNamara later regretted the war in Vietnam. Would Rumsfeld do the same! On the other hand, the American writer David Halberstam chronicled America's ordeal in Vietnam in his magisterial book, *The Best and the Brightest*. Perhaps, a similar literary work is waiting to tell the full story of the 13-year war between Washington and Baghdad.

The 1956 Suez Crisis

Right after the *Bush v. Gore* court case ended in December 2000, I sent several articles to the editorial boards of major American newspapers telling them the following: (1) The election of George W. Bush will precipitate a crisis and war will happen between the U.S. and Iraq; (2) I explained to the American readers the concept of *al-thar* (revenge) in the Arab mentality and what it means; (3) I also predicted that the new confrontation between Washington and Baghdad will be modeled on the example of the Suez Crisis. It would cause a West-split strategy, however, the roles would be switched. In October-November 1956, Israel, France and Britain attacked Egypt because of its nationalization of the Suez Canal. The Eisenhower Administration and the ultimatum issued by the Soviet Prime Minister Nikolai Bulganin stopped the foreign invasion of Egypt. The Suez Crisis led to the demise of European colonial dominance in the Middle East. The third Gulf War copied the Suez Crisis scenario in several aspects. To my chagrin and disappointment, all of my written submissions were not published. Yet one question has been already answered: would Putin do for Saddam what Bulganin did for Nasser? The answer to this question reveals how Moscow defines its course of superpowers' brinkmanship with Washington over the Middle East.

The outcome of Operation Iraqi Freedom was decided by the following factors:

- How effective American-British forces were in controlling major cities in Iraq and at what cost.
- How bombing of Iraq avoided holy places.
- How ineffective Saddam's loyalists projected their power.
- Friendly fires proved costly to both sides.
- Helicopters were decisive weapons.
- The number and strength of Iraqi defense lines. Iraq had three or four main lines of defense in the outskirts of and inside Baghdad. Most of them were eliminated before the American troops entered the city. Iraq adopted anti-personnel war techniques to antagonize the Americans over the war with more deaths reported. America and Britain experienced losses beyond what was expected by the public.
- How Iraq used its regular army, conventional weapons and air defenses in fighting the Americans and the British. Iraq was outgunned by its opponents. Again, there was big mutual losses.
- Waves of suicide bombers composed a critical element in testing and challenging American and British military campaigns in Iraq.
- If chemical and biological weapons were used, they could have turned Baghdad's four-lane boulevards into a square of death.

Art & Religion

In The Forest of Amida Buddha

By Junko Chodos, Artist
Los Angeles

In the summer of 1993, I saw the Amida Buddha in my back yard. My back yard was a forest: big oak trees spread their branches touching each other, creating a warm dark shade underneath; eucalyptus stretched their long slender bodies far above them and swayed in the sky. The forest continued without any fence into the State Park, and into the Santa Monica Mountains beyond. It was there in the forest of my back yard that I saw the Amida Buddha. He showed his figure behind the trees moving swiftly like a wind, as if he were playing hide-and-seek through the forest.

Amida Buddha is the Buddha who governs the "Pureland" hundreds of millions of miles beyond the place where the sun sets. All Buddhists dream of being reborn on one of the petals of the lotus which grows in the pond in Pureland. If you succeed to see the vision of Pureland vividly enough in day or night to the degree that the vision become more real than the scene of this world to you, you will be reborn into the Pureland. Elaborate methods of meditation, of how to imagine the whole detail of the Pureland, were written in the sacred scriptures and had been taught for hundreds of years. Helping you and disciplining you how to develop your imagination to visualize the supreme beauty was the work of the artist as well as of the priest. A deep, essential connection between art and faith was thus established, and excellent art works depicting Pureland were produced and this tradition flourished.

But as time went by, around the Eleventh Century, people came to believe that the cosmic law was in decline - a period prophesied to come to pass 1500 years after Buddha's death. Then the strict discipline of meditation was not good enough to be reborn in to the Pureland. Relying on Buddha's redemption and on his mercy became more crucial. People started to portray Amida speeding down to earth on a jet of clouds to pick up the dying souls, instead of sitting on a lotus waiting for them to find him. The scene of this Amida Buddha standing on the cloud and speeding down like a wind became one of the most popular themes in Japanese art history. He will embrace every dying soul as he is, disregarding what he has done in this world, for it was believed that no ill thought or action of the human being is strong enough to obstruct Amida Buddha's overwhelming power of mercy. People on their death beds die in ecstasy at seeing Amida Buddha. "But what on earth is he doing in my backyard?" — "Because the time has come." Both the question and the answer hit me at the same time.

It was a time that a serious illness struck someone I love and the possibility of his death was in the range of

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I put my hand on the bark of the trees and put my arms around them and asked each one of them to give his vitality to my loved one. And I started to paint the powerful but mysterious figures of the trees...

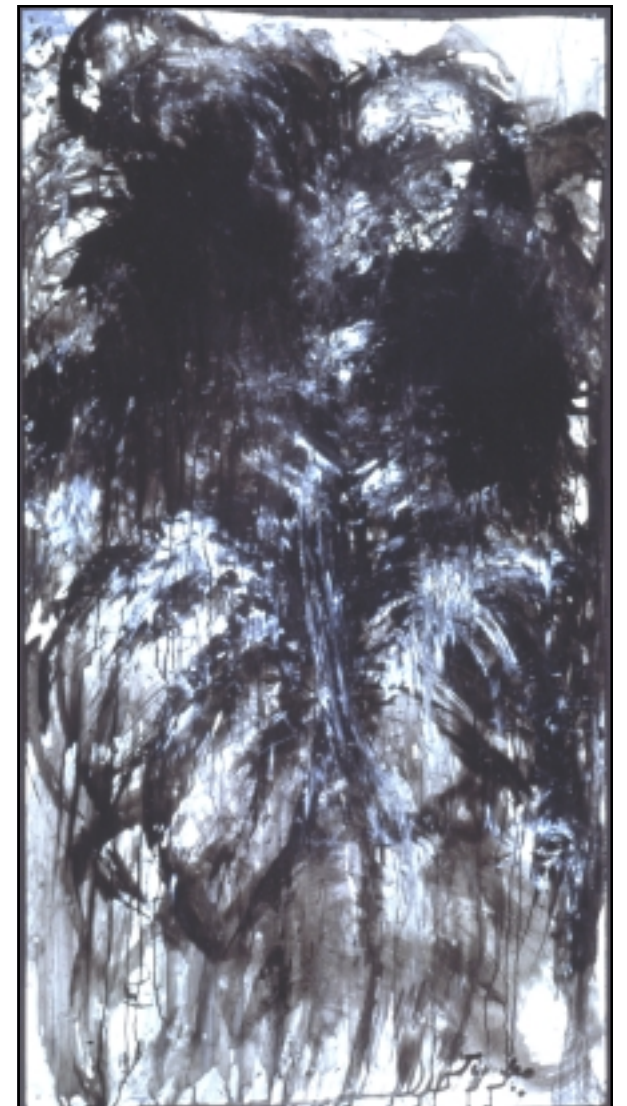
reality. I put my hand on the bark of the trees and put my arms around them and asked each one of them to give his vitality to my loved one. And I started to paint the powerful but mysterious figures of the trees using black acrylic and sumi ink on mylar, bigger than my height. My paintings of the forest came out to be intense and dark. I painted 21 of those. And then suddenly I saw that the forest in my painting turned red instead of black and seemed to be flaming up like fire. I painted three more paintings of those red forests. I found myself, as so many times happens during the process of creating art, in the midst of some mysterious narrative, which could be unfolded to me only by following the visual images, which were always far ahead of me. In the meanwhile, my loved one went through a surgery without anticipated incident. Though I was puzzled and disturbed by the flaming image of the red forest, my fear of his death was to a certain degree resolved.

A few months later, the Malibu fires of November 1993 which had destroyed thousands of acres of the wild forests along the California coast finally reached to my back yard. The fire stood high in the sky behind the mountain and swiftly came down to my Amida forest and lapped at the edge of my house for four days. Amida's forest became part of the area declared to be a national disaster. I glimpsed my house which was standing at the edge of the forest looking small and vulnerable on the TV screen at the evacuation place. And then in a second, my view was blocked by a curtain of fire, the camera showed only the flaming forest, and the images of trees falling in the flames were repeated over and over. They were exactly like those paintings I had created few months before.

My house remained unburned but the forest had disappeared entirely from this earthly plane and left only a burnt hillside as its trace. The trees that I embraced and asked to give their vitality to my loved one were lying - some down on the ground black, on top of one another, some were still standing but black. I was stunned. "Did

these trees sacrifice themselves in the purifying flame in order to give their vitality to my loved one in response to my prayer? Did it happen because it is Forest of Amida Buddha? Where did Amida Buddha go? "No answer came. Only the birds who lost their nests in those trees were frantically making circles above them with sharp shrieking cries as if they were mourning over the dead trees. My loved one recovered from his illness and the shadow of death which had fallen over our life passed on. I created one more work of the forest, this time a gold forest, which did not grow in the back yard but it grew solemnly in my mind. And with this 25th work, the narrative which I had been unfolding, and which still remained something of a mystery, was completed.

Incidentally green shoots and leaves started coming back from the trunks of the black trees the very next spring



In the Forest of Amida Buddha, No. 16
by Junko Chodos, 1993.
Sumi and acrylic on industrial mylar
79" high x 42" wide.

and those trees are now higher than the roof of my house. They formed a new forest, not exactly thick and dark like before but the trees are vital and beautiful again.

Junko Chodos (www.junkochodos.com) is a Japanese-born artist who came to America to live over 30 years ago. She has exhibited at many venues throughout the United States, Germany and Japan. Her book, *The Transformative Vision of Junko Chodos*, won the Independent Publishers Art Book of the Year Award.

Orthodox Bishops in America Issue Appeal For Prayer and Humanitarian Relief in Iraq

The hierarchs of the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas (SCOBA) expressed their anguish about the war in Iraq. "Once again," the nine archbishops said in a press release, "due to the presence of sin and evil in the world, nations and people of faith have been unable to avoid a dreadful confrontation."

"As heads of Orthodox Christian communities in North America we are compelled to call our pious clergy and faithful to pray for peace and for respect of the sanctity of all human persons.

We ask our churches to open their doors during this season of the Great Lent for people to enter, light a candle, and pray for peace and reconciliation among nations.

We exhort our faithful to pray for all the people who live in areas of conflict. For the innocent women, children and elderly who live in places of high risk and harm, for those in flight, for refugees throughout the region who join others on a journey of profound uncertainty.

May the peace and love of God be with all of you."
(Abridged from www.antiochian.org.)

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A Voice from the Fifth Century for the Holy Season of Lent

Concerning Repentance

by St. Mark the Monk (Part 6)

Translated by Revd. Dr. Tim Vivian, CA
and Dr. Augustine Casiday, UK

12. If we struggle and fight by repenting, even to the point of death, we do not thereby fulfill our obligation, for such struggle does not entitle us to the kingdom of heaven. Just as we eat and drink and speak and hear, so too by nature ought we repent.

The person who is worthy of dying once has died in accordance with the law [Heb 9:27] and the person who lives by faith [Gal 2:20] lives on account of repentance. Even if it is not on account of our sin but rather the sin of the transgression [Gen 3], we are cleansed when we are baptized and, once we are cleansed, we receive commandments. The person who does not do the latter has profaned the former and "is forgetful of the cleansing of his past sins" [2 Pet 1:9]. No one is found without sins every day lest he ever neglect any of the commandments.

Repentance should therefore be a requirement for everyone. Because of repentance, those things that at one time had to be done by an act of will are now done instinctively because one hates the passion and avoids its consequences. The person who circumscribes repentance turns back [Lk 9:62] and repeats his old transgressions. The person who has knowledge of the truth [1 Tim 2:4] knows that he also needs repentance, for each of them is guided by the other. Christ has made himself the guarantor of our repentance; the person who neglects it rejects him who made the guarantee. As for works, we are unable to do anything worthy but have great mercy shown us on account of our intentions. The person who acts forcefully until the day of his death and grabs hold of repentance will be saved, even if he sins in certain matters, on account of his forceful action [Mt 11:12]. The Lord has promised this in the Gospels.

The person who says he does not need repentance judges himself to be righteous and is called an "evil grandchild" by Scripture [Prov 30:12 (LXX)]. The person who conceitedly assumes that he is in a state of righteousness as though he had perfected repentance and finished with it has, on the contrary, in my opinion joined forces with the pleasures, if self-conceit and arrogance are indeed pleasures. The person who is self-conceited cannot be saved, for, it is written, "the conceited and contemptuous braggart will never accomplish anything" [Hab 2:5]. If humility in no way harms the perfect, even the braggart himself cannot get rid of its source, repentance!

Faithful Abraham and righteous Job called themselves "earth and ashes" [Gen 18:27; Job 42:6]. These words

are the mark of humility. The person who satisfies himself that he has had his fill of repentance cannot be humble. The three children who were truly great witnesses confessed in the midst of burning flames that they had both sinned and broken the law, saying that they had repented their past evils, and were perfect thereafter, and almost their whole song of praise demonstrates the power of repentance [Dan 3:26-45].

13. If then both those who have been very pleasing to God and those who through their works have been shown to be perfect have made use of this resource until the day of their death, who, under the pretext of righteousness, will afterwards place his confidence in himself and disregard repentance?

It is my belief that even if someone were as holy as Paul or Peter, not even then would he undertake abandoning the source of humility. For this reason Peter likened himself to Cornelius; by doing this, he downplayed what was divine and manifested his own character by saying, "Stand up; I too am only a mortal" [Acts 10:26] and confessed that he had been taught by God to say that no one was profane or unclean [Acts 10:28].

Paul, after having grace given to him by Christ [Acts 26:12-18], believing that he would nowhere find rest until the day he died, spoke thus: "But I press on to make it my own because Christ has made me his own" [Phil 3:12]. By "making it his own" he means "persevering until his death," just as, when he wrote to faithful Timothy, he made it clear that his death was near, saying, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" [2 Tim 4:7]. He did not provide for himself a way out or a time limit, as though he had given up the race because he had finished it and no longer needed to fight on behalf of the body of Christ (which is the Church) [Col 1:24]—he did not ever give up the race while he was on the earth; he said, rather, that his death would mark the end of the race and the end of the fight. Thus he says, "I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come" [2 Tim 4:6].

Do you see that he did not say "I am stopping" but rather "I am already being poured out as a libation." Both these words and these actions demonstrate to everyone that our obligation to repentance ends with sacrifice and death, on behalf of Christ, the heavenly King, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

The translation offered here for the first time into English is part of Vivian-Casiday's two forthcoming volumes, *Mark the Monk: On the Spiritual Life*. Publisher: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press (www.svots.edu/SVS-Press).