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Heavy heart

By any measure, the White House-proclaimed New World Order is triumphant in the only part of the world that matters to most Americans.

Consumer confidence has returned. The faltering real estate and construction market has found new life. Wall Street hit record peaks Tuesday. Meanwhile, the dollar is climbing back to respectability among the world's currencies.

We are assured this is the glowing spring our national pride prayed for during a long winter of deep discontent. We are told America has finally kicked "the Vietnam syndrome." We are promised a Big Bang Blowout! come Independence Day.

As events and omens, they're all perfectly lovely. Only, I don't remember that George Bush named any of these things as reasons for taking this country to war.

Of course, reading newspapers every day, I perfectly understand why the White House wishes to avoid mention of its previously proclaimed objectives. "Restoring freedom to Kuwait" was never more than political double-talk. It really meant the return of the ruling as-Sabah clan and its supporters whose deep pockets allowed them to stay comfortably out of harm's way. International luxury hotels and particularly Cairo discos seem to have been their preferred foxholes.

Fortunately, U.S.-led forces quickly chased the remnants of the Iraqi army, those few too patriotic, foolish or greedy to desert before the shooting began.

Unfortunately, Americans were forced to stand aside and witness the summary massacre of Palestinians and other life-long "foreign" residents. There were no trials on the alleged collaboration charges. The execution squads were led by members of the royal family, until international protests brought a halt.

Tragically, the persecution continues. Many Kuwait residents who followed their rulers into exile are being turned back at the border, dividing families who have known no other home. The privilege of citizenship is reserved for the few who can prove descent from the emirate's early years.

Apparently, Mr. Bush's New World Order will not change the past White House practice of overlooking human rights violations by its friends. When this nation's young are asked to put their lives on the line, customary diplomatic "pragmatism" should not apply.

However, rolling back Iraq's invasion was not the reason most Americans backed the U.N. resolution. It was not "for" Kuwait

but against Hussein that they cheered their loved ones off to war.

Reviewing U.S. history, I can find no parallel for the enmity orchestrated against "the butcher of Baghdad." The man to whom he was frequently compared was not the target of such venom until the end of World War II brought revelation of the depth of Hitler's crimes, especially the death camps.

Tojo and his fellow warlords generated a special hatred, in part because their sneak attack on Pearl Harbor destroyed this country's sense of invincibility. In that war's early years Americans had good cause to fear a direct attack on this country.

By contrast, the only threat outside the Middle East posed by Hussein was at the gas pumps. He had neither the navy nor the air power to reach these shores.

Moreover, his eight-year war against Iran crippled his people's financial future and cost one in every seven his life. Invading Kuwait was the dictator's desperate gamble to avoid an inevitable collapse. In truth, the destruction of the Hussein regime was never an objective of the U.S.-led coalition. Most of our allies dreaded the consequences that could have resulted from Iraq's complete collapse. They worry about Iran's fanatical fundamentalism.

Understand, there would have been general rejoicing on all sides (except the most radical) if the dictator had been replaced by someone less ambitious. But Hussein's periodic blood-letting among his followers had killed off all probable candidates. In other words, minus a lucky missile, Mr. Bush knew from the start that Iraq's future leader would almost certainly be the "new Hitler," the man the White House taught Americans to hate with a violent passion.

No harm done, you might say. We won the war and at small cost to American lives. Our soldiers are coming home. That's what really matters. And I agree.

But I am neither a Kurd nor Iraqi Arab who believed Mr. Bush's rhetoric meant the United States was prepared to help me displace the dictator who had murdered my kinsmen. My children were not incinerated on the street where my home once stood. As an American grandfather, I do not want our young men and women going back into a region our government will not take the time to understand. My heart is heavy with the human cost our politicians continue to exact in other lands, to suit their egos and ambitions.