

FROM



WASHINGTON

By Mark Bruzonsky



Though few admit it, nation is celebrating hollow victory

WASHINGTON, D.C. - On Saturday, June 8th, Washington will have what may be its greatest celebration ever. Tanks and armor will roll through the streets. Huge B-52s and gleaming fighter aircraft will streak through the skies. Flags will flutter from every lamp pole and street light as never before. Bands will blare as soldiers, sailors, marines, veterans and all the other uniformed services march in the tropical humid heat that has already descended on this capital setting historic records for the month of May — also as never before.

And in all likelihood, the newspapers are already speculating, more than a million spectators will gawk and shout; scream and sometimes cry. Gazing in awe at the parade of human and material power that will pass before them will be a sea of American patriots and

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believers. The hundreds of thousands who came to march in protest back in January will be nowhere to be seen, forgotten by their fellow citizens, miserable in their impotence.

President Bush, General Schwarzkopf, and Chairman Colin Powell will all officiate together — modern heroes not to all but to a great many. And no doubt CNN will bring this American extravaganza to much of the world as well — another first in this age of the global village.

Then, just two days later, it will happen all over again in New York City — except that traditional ticker-tape parade will last three days.

Some will say Saddam Hussein is responsible for all this unnecessary and undeserved American hoopla; that Saddam Hussein provided just the excuse the Americans needed to unleash their technological firepower; that the Iraqi leader really screwed up and brought about just the opposite of what he has spent his adult lifetime trying to achieve. And they will be right.

Others will say that America, like Britain before her, is in reality a contracting empire; and that contracting empires traditionally look for ways to project their waning power and reassure themselves even in the midst of their declining dominance. And they will be right.

Still others will insist that no matter what problems America faces, judged relative to others, especially when measured against the other now self-destructing super power, the U.S. is not in such bad shape. And, relatively speaking, they too will be right.

Never mind that unemployment and underemployment have grown rampantly to unprecedented proportions in the Reagan/Bush era — greater than at anytime since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Never mind that drugs and crime increasingly have much of American society threatened and traumatized. Never mind that just a few blocks from the Washington parade route past the White House the streets of Washington recently exploded in

an orgy of violence and destruction that forced the mayor to declare a multi-night curfew.

Never mind that many key American cities are quite literally on the verge of bankruptcy with basic public services — including libraries and zoos — being cut back, transportation systems in urgent need of basic repairs, taxes ever-rising and services ever-declining.

Never mind that the U.S. savings and loan fiasco has called into question the basic stability of the American financial and banking systems as at no time since the banking collapse a couple of generations ago.

Never mind that in just the past decade America has completely reversed its financial status in the world from being the world's greatest creditor nation to the international community's greatest debtor.

And never mind that the at first neglected and still underfunded AIDS crisis increasingly is threatening the lives of hundreds of thousands of Americans and could soon spread to true epidemic proportions.

The largely unspoken reality of the day is that the American empire is at this very moment in a state of schizophrenic confusion. The U.S. may have won the post-World War II U.S.-Soviet "cold war". But maybe this really wasn't so much an American victory as a Soviet loss; maybe Bolshevism was never a very adequate political petri dish for testing the growth of socialism and the theories of communism in the first place.

Whatever, the American polity these days is repeatedly gorging itself with ongoing celebrations of its "great victory" over a third world country just a fraction of its size that was bombarded for months by unprecedented air power against which it had no defense.

Yet while the celebration goes on hundreds of thousands of northern Iraqi Kurds, hundreds of thousands of southern Iraqi Shiites, and hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children, remain in danger of malnutrition, illness, and death.

In a world of modern tribes called nations this is our common fate. While one tribe prospers another suffers. While one tribe gorges itself, others starve.

The technology of warfare is surely "modern". Indeed, human technological achievements are such that the planet earth is itself endangered as never before.

But human morality remains that of our ancestral, tribal, selfish past. And all the shouting, flag-waving and celebrating that continues in this land — while at the same time so much suffering has erupted in the wake of the great American military victory — perfectly illustrates how primitive and self-centered a species we remain.

Mark A. Bruzonsky's syndicated "From Washington" column appears in a number of newspapers throughout the Middle East and in this paper in the United States. Bruzonsky can be reached in Washington at (202) 362-6033, by fax to (202) 362-6965, and on MCIMail to MAB.