

07/02/2003

A letter to President Bush

Alexandra Wong

Dear Mr President,

I'VE been thinking of visiting your country for some time. They say in New York the city never sleeps and you can get inch-thick steaks for US\$10 (RM38) and you've not experienced a proper childhood until you visit Disneyland.

Of late, I've been having second thoughts though. Having been inundated by reports of Muslims scrambling to meet the Immigration and Naturalisation Service January 15 registration deadline, and most recently, the finger printing formality that Malaysians were subjected to, I'm not sure what kind of treatment I'd get if I stepped foot into your country as a tourist.

Truth be told, Mr President, I'm kind of upset with your recent heavy-handedness in dealing with international sensitivities.

Labelling Iraq, North Korea and China the "axis of evil"?

Tsk tsk. Such sophomoric name-calling ought to be left to tongue-studded teenagers in malls. Not only is it snigger-childish, it smacks of a hubris-ridden conquistador mentality which is more Shi "Great Wall of China" Huang Ti than George "Genteel-and-Gentrified-because-you-got-a-degree-from-Yale" Bush Jr. Why, your cabinet has served up one verbal gaffe after another.

First, it was your now-infamous "axis of evil" and just the other day your Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfield whipped up the stormy Atlantic seas by dissing your NATO allies Germany and France as representing the "old Europe of the past".

Forget Chicago or Lord of the Rings, we only need to tune in to Channel Politica Americana for good old-fashioned entertainment.

But take heart, you are not alone as Michael Jackson, ex-poster boy for Yankee wholesomeness, would say. You have esteemed company to handhold you through this political wilderness, including your predecessor's deputy.

Coincidentally, his biggest faux pax was committed in Malaysia. At an APEC Business Council Advisory meeting hosted by Prime Minister Dr Mahathir, he praised the opposition party and accused the Malaysian government of suppressing democracy.

The Press had a field day Gore-ing him.

It seems to me that you too suffer from a dearth of good speech-writers. After all, George Senior once had to enjoin people to READ HIS LIPS in order to get his drift. Hey if you like, maybe I could pull some strings and get our own etiquette doyenne Datuk Ampikainathan to give you a lesson or two on diplomacy.

Back to your heavy-handedness, people are saying you are trigger happy and all. Personally, I think everyone should get the benefit of the doubt, including you. And I'm sure that is also your personal stand on the Iraq issue - that they're innocent until the UN folks have gone through their arsenal with a fine-toothed comb.

Please don't allow your judgment to be clouded by your atavistic henchmen or - heaven forbid, those corporate folks who have the business ethics of Bonnie and Clyde.

Business and moral ethics seems to be sorely lacking. In an unrelated issue I read on MSN that Steven Spielberg and Steven Soderbergh are suing 11 companies for editing violent/sexual scenes out of their movies, citing copyright and trademark infringement.

The whole hullabaloo started when a company called Clean Flicks edited out some shoot-out scenes from Saving Private Ryan to make it more family friendly. Another named Trilogy Studios developed a software which instructs the DVD player to display a picture of Kate Winslet clothed with a corset in that pivotal nude painting scene in Titanic.

I'm puzzled here. Removing explicit material out of products for mass consumption is a BAD thing? If artistic licence is indeed more important than moral safeguarding, then we might as well do away with all the PG13 ratings.

But I digress. Please Mr President, I implore you, if my ineloquent arguments fail to convince you, then let the statistics speak for themselves. Just last week, some 50,000 people held a peaceful demonstration in Washington to protest against an Iraq offensive.

These were not finger-printed Arabs who feared their green cards would be revoked but comprised mainly Americans from the professional demographics. You used to enjoy an approval rating of 82 per cent circa January 2002, the highest of any US president since Franklin D. Roosevelt. (He peaked at 84 per cent after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941).

It is funny how American Presidents' popularity hinges on their armed appeal but that's another story. As of January 25, you are at 54 per cent, down from December's 62 per cent. The Los Angeles Times poll found: 1) 72 per cent of Americans say you haven't made the case for war; 2) support for a ground war has fallen from 70 to 58 per cent; and 3) only 26 per cent would support a unilateral attack.

If these media polls (which for some unfathomable reason your country is so fond of) are any bellwether of your popularity, sir with all due respect I think you are in trouble. Don't get me wrong, I would not dare to tell you how to run your country.

At 56 years old, I'm sure you've eaten more bread than I have rice, but, to put it bluntly, you should clean up your own backyard before minding other nations' business. Sorry if you take offence at all this.

With all due respect,
Alexandra Wong