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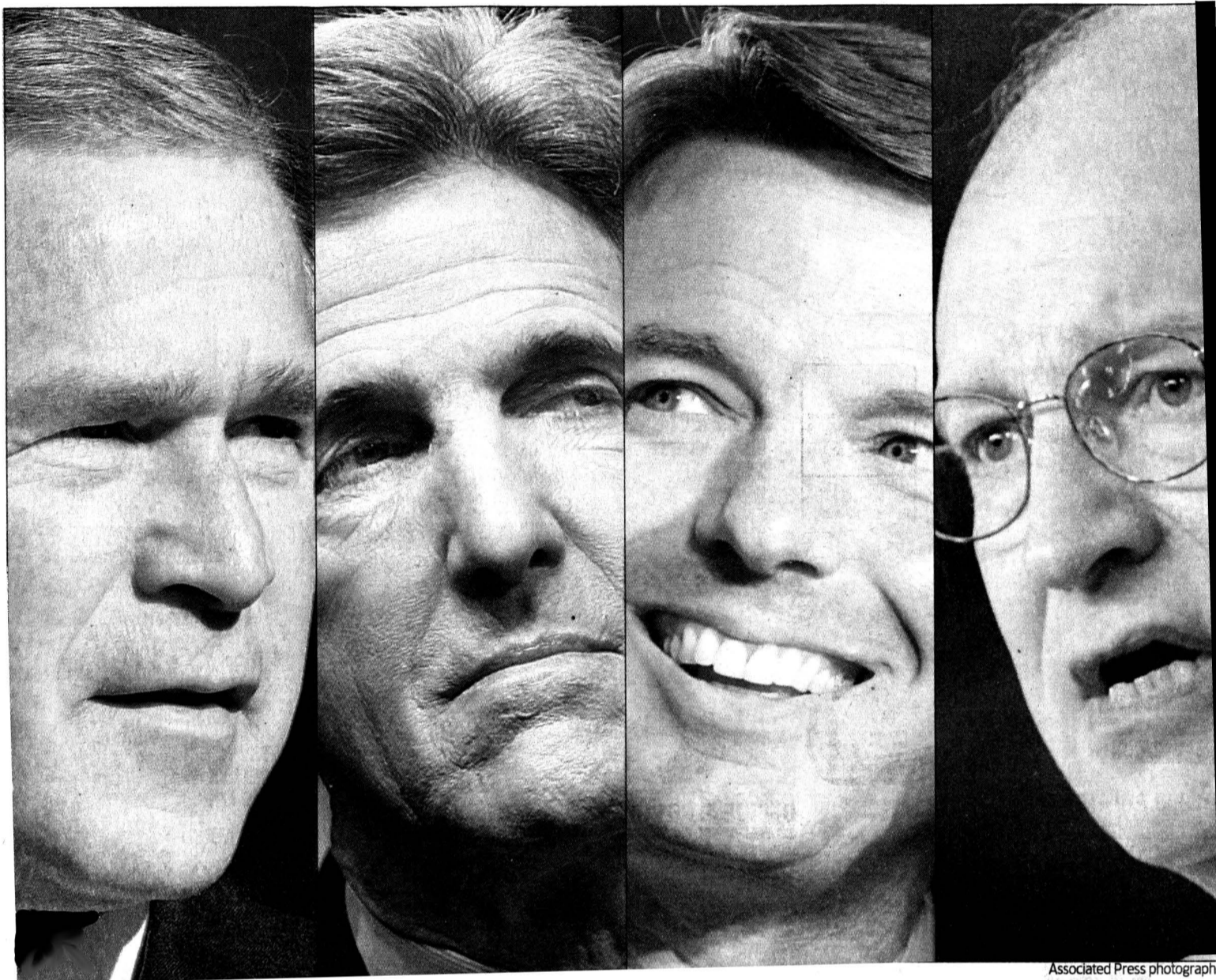
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FORUM

SUNDAY
October 24, 2004

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Associated Press photograph

Lessons for leaders

By Tom Palaima
SPECIAL TO THE BEE

In Act 1, Scene 2 of Shakespeare's "Henry V," King Henry, contemplating committing soldiers to a war in France, cautions his advisers, the archbishop of Canterbury and bishop of Ely, to know and know deeply the consequences of the advice they are asked to offer.

They will wake the "sleeping sword of war" and each drop of soldier's blood will be an indictment against those who incite "such waste in brief mortality." Somberness of purpose over the prospect of going to war is what citizens of most nations, when their thoughts are not clouded by fear, patriotic fervor, hatred and other strong emotions, demand of their leaders. In Shakespeare's play, decisions are in the hands of a king and an inner circle of nobility and high clergy.

Things are different in a democracy. Or are they? The presidential and vice-presidential debates and the campaign strategies of both parties have concentrated on the question of leadership. What does it take to be president of our democratic govern-

**In many ways,
challenges
have changed
little since
ancient times**

ment during large-scale military operations overseas - notice I do not say war - when we are also facing major economic and social problems at home? Do President George W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney and Sens. John Kerry and John Edwards have the personal qualities and skills necessary to be chief executive and commander-in-chief or a heartbeat away from being so?

These are important questions, and it is natural to focus on them in times of crisis. But they are distracting us from historical perspectives on what overall leadership a democracy like ours needs in troubled times like these. And these questions are framed as if we had the form of government Aristotle thought ideal: a single ruler.

Kerry in the debates has stressed that he supported giving our president unilateral authority to take military action in Iraq because he believes "it was the right authority for a president to have." But is it? If it is, what qualities of leadership should a president have in order to be given the most fearsome powers any national leader can possess? Kerry maintains that President Bush rushed to war incautiously and impatiently without exhausting international sanctions and weapons inspections, without building strong international support and without working out a plan for peace after the major combat phase was over. He also thinks the president misled the American people on the reasons for going to war. So he at least thinks that honesty, a strong grasp of the tools of international diplomacy, patience in

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Leaders: Classical examples

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dealing with other nations, allied or hostile, and thorough advance preparation for varied outcomes of any actions are four necessary presidential qualities. Bush has emphasized two other qualities: consistency of policy and unwavering determination to see it through.

Candidates and voters need to discuss such things, but our question remains: Why did Kerry, 76 other senators and over two-thirds of our representatives think it was wise to put this particular president in a position where they effectively could no longer exercise the controls over war granted to Congress by our Constitution and reemphasized by the congressional War Powers Resolution of 1973? The U.S. Constitution grants to Congress the power to declare war. Yet all of our major military conflicts since World War II have been undertaken without such a formal declaration: the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the first Gulf War, Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom and the open-ended war on terror.

And we commonly call even the two Orwellian-titled "operations" on this list the war in Afghanistan and the war in Iraq.

Why do our elected representatives consistently hand over to the executive branch the authority to make war? In August 1964, only Sens. Wayne Morse and Ernest Gruening cast votes against the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. They foresaw the consequences of its clause authorizing the president to repel armed attacks on U.S. forces. This became President Johnson's pretext for committing troops to Vietnam and President Nixon's pretext for continuing the war. Only Morse had the courage in February 1966 to condemn President Johnson for committing us to an illegal war, i.e., one which Congress had not formally declared. He might also have condemned his fellow senators for enabling Johnson to do so. His was truly a voice in the political wilderness.

The lessons of Vietnam have been forgotten — partly because the memory of the Vietnam War has been trivialized as a mere litmus test for the civic characters of Bush and Kerry when they were of an age to serve in the military, and partly because our all-volunteer, numerically downsized army means that most of our children are not right now at risk to go and fight in the Middle East. It is especially surprising, given what I view as Kerry's courageous congressional testimony in April 1971 as spokesman for Vietnam Veterans Against the War, that he seems to have forgotten how that "wrong war in the wrong place at the wrong time" started.

On Oct. 10, 2002, only 23 sena-

tors and 133 representatives voted against the joint resolution authorizing President Bush to use the armed forces of the United States as he "determines to be necessary and appropriate in order to defend the national security of the United States against the continuing threat posed by Iraq." Why? We'll leave aside the cynical answer of political expediency.

The main answer seems to be that in unsettled times even democratic states revert to the notion that one leader can better respond to developing crises without being impeded by normal democratic procedures. But this also takes away from that often all-too-human leader the full checks and balances and different perspectives built into democratic governments.

Aristotle was aware, as we all should be, of how this principle can go wrong. He reasoned that the risks of his favorite form of government, enlightened monarchy, being distorted into reckless tyranny are so great that rule of the few (oligarchy) and rule of the many (democracy) are better options. Democracy, the least desirable form of government in theory, was preferable in practice because its aberrant form caused least harm.

The belief that one forceful leader can see more clearly and can do better than the messy procedures of democratic government has a long history in western tradition. Greek political theorists beginning with Homer and Hesiod and down through Aristotle favored the notion found in "The Iliad": "Let there be one ruler, one king." But again this is based on the assumption that this one leader possesses nearly ideal qualities and noble intentions.

The poems of Hesiod reflect beliefs about autocratic authority that long prevailed in Greece and the Near East, namely that kings, when they work in harmony with the gods, will literally bring divinely sanctioned law and order and prosperity to their communities. I believe that vestiges of this collective "religious" instinct explain the intensity of reaction by many Americans to Bill Clinton's otherwise inconsequential act of consensual sex with another adult in the Oval Office. This was about more than the dignity of the office of president. It tapped into almost primordial feelings that our president's moral behavior also affects whether divine powers will favor our nation or not.

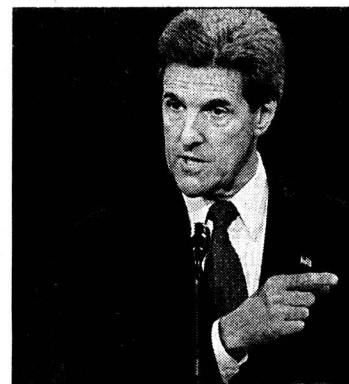
Do nations have to behave as we have for the last half century? The answer is no. Very clear historical proof of this is offered by what happened during the first major world war in western civilization, the Peloponnesian War (431-404 B.C.) between Athens

and Sparta and their respective allies and the 50-year Cold War that preceded it. This conflict has long been studied for historical lessons pertaining to the modern Cold War between the Soviet Union (Sparta) and the United States (Athens). In fact Donald Kagan, the leading American Thucydides scholar of his generation, has used his interpretation of the Peloponnesian War to offer historical support for the policies of the Bush administration.

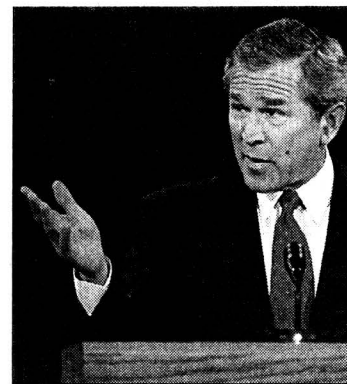
Athens was the prototypical democracy and headed a large defensive alliance. Sparta was a conservative quasi-socialist state headed by a dual kingship. Both had councils and assemblies that within their systems, roughly speaking, mirrored our Senate and House of Representatives. How did these two different forms of government react to the stresses of a protracted arms race and then 27 years of all-out war? Neither government ever suspended their normal procedures, and both underwent several changes of leadership. The Spartans never became frustrated by United Nations-style consultations with their allies. These conferences often took the form of complex and heated debates among different factions. The Spartan government also contained three safeguards against unilateral action by either of their kings. A senate (gerousia) of 28 elders and the two kings and a public assembly (apella) of all full citizens determined what the two Spartan kings were to do in any annual military campaign season. There was also a board of five appointed magistrates (ephors) who oversaw the conduct of the kings.

Athenian democracy was so radical its full features have never been seen again. It demanded direct participation of its citizens who would not have understood how we can view government as a bad thing. From its 40,000 adult male citizens, all of whom served as soldiers, the Athenians chose yearly by random lot a congress (boulé) of 500 citizens. These 500 common citizens acted as the legislative body. Again the Athenians would be flabbergasted that we find a few days of jury duty onerous.

Still all final decisions on legislation, including whether and how to go to war, were debated and voted on by a universal citizen assembly (ekklesia). During 75 years of cold war build-up and world war, this system stayed in place — after major military setbacks, after political assassinations, after a catastrophic plague. Only at the end of these eight decades was the democratic government overturned by right-wing coups led by conservatives who thought they could do better. They couldn't.



Associated Press/Kevork Djanssezian



Associated Press/Matt York

In the final presidential debate on Oct. 13, did Sen. John Kerry and President George W. Bush display their leadership abilities?

We have a wise conservative voice from this period, the Greek historian and general Thucydides. I think other present-day ancient historians would agree with me that from Thucydides we know Pericles.

Neither George Bush nor John Kerry is Pericles.

Pericles knew war (advantage Kerry) and he knew politics at a level far outstripping our governor-turned-president and our senator aspiring to be president. Pericles ran yearly for the one elected post in the Athenian government, the board of 10 generals. And he won every year except one, when his policies caused major suffering among the Athenian populace.

Thucydides also served as general and he, too, understood the down side to Athenian democracy. For a mission failure, he was sent into exile in Sparta in the eighth year of the Peloponnesian War, after which he also saw the war from both sides. His assessment of what the Athenian statesman and general Pericles contributed to Athenian democracy during his more than 30 years of political ascendancy (461-429 B.C.E.) is worth noting.

Thucydides famously concluded that Athens was a democracy in name only, and effectively the rule of one man, Pericles. Thucydides describes Pericles' actions and sums up his qualities as a leader. He had good breeding. Both Kerry and Bush are children of privilege and Ivy League educations. Pericles had Clintonesque intellectual ability and more. The advantage here surely goes to Kerry. Pericles also had integrity. No comment.

Pericles was capable of laying out to the Athenian people at length an ideal vision of the best they could be. Here President Bush's clear talking points probably give him an edge with the broad populace. Pericles praised the fact that Athens, even in times of war, had an open society and no need for a Spartan-style secret police or other restrictions on what we would call civil liberties.

He would have had no use for the Patriot Act.

At other times, Pericles could speak publicly with shocking frankness and absolute honesty

about the use and consequences of Athenian imperial power and about the failures of his own policies.

Recall how President Bush dodged the Town Hall questioner who asked him to name three mistakes he had made and what he had done to remedy those mistakes.

Pericles was a master of international diplomacy, advised patience in the use of force, and stressed that the Athenians should not overextend their military or waste their manpower. These have been key topics of dispute in all of the debates. Pericles had the knack both for calming down the Athenians when they got too worked up and for restoring their confidence when they turned defeatist.

Keep in mind, too, that when Pericles spoke to citizens, he was speaking to citizens who were also the soldiers, legislators and active voters of Athens. Pericles used his virtues and wrought their effects within the framework of a full democratic process. He never asked for unilateral war powers — and it is unlikely he would have been granted them if he had. And he was held fully accountable for his actions and policies by the Athenian government and electorate.

Pericles is certainly a good model for the qualities an ideal democratic president should possess. But we rarely get the ideal. It is giving away no secrets to say that we will not get the ideal this time, no matter which candidate we choose.

My own strong feeling, based on these and other lessons of history, is that we should do much more besides voting for Bush-Cheney or Kerry-Edwards. We should put bipartisan pressure on our senators and representatives and other public figures, including journalists, to represent us as they should. They should not cede the voice they are supposed to give us to one man, Republican or Democrat, and his inner circle of advisers, especially when the result may be the tragic "waste in brief mortality," American and foreign, we caused in Vietnam and are now causing again in Iraq. Most of all, we should remember that right now we still resemble Periclean Athens more than the England of Henry V.