

U.S. Must Share Burden of World Leadership, Ambassador Says

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By his own description, **Sichan Siv's** life is intertwined with the **United Nations**.

Long before Mr. Siv became a **United States** ambassador to the international body, he benefited from its charter.

As a child, **UNICEF** vaccinated him. When he escaped the killing fields of **Cambodia** in 1976 by jumping off of a truck and trekking through the jungle to reach the **Thailand** border, a U.N. Refugee group took him in.

After leaving Thailand, he was granted access to the U.S. He resettled in **Connecticut**, having arrived with two dollars in his pocket. Only 13 years later, in a remarkable but fitting turnaround for a man who spent his childhood and college days reading about America and pondering about life beyond his country's borders, Mr. Siv was called into President **George H. W. Bush's** administration as a political liaison and later became a deputy assistant secretary for **South Asian** affairs.

After narrowly escaping one dictator's brand of tyranny, Mr. Siv now had a front seat to a "series of sea changes" in the world, including the **Tiananmen Square** massacre in **Beijing** as well as the destruction of the **Berlin Wall** and the collapse the **Soviet Union**.

"For somebody like me to be sitting there only 13 years after I escaped from tyranny, to see history taking shape in front of my eyes, that was quite an overwhelming experience," Mr. Siv said while giving a talk at **Emory University on the role of U.S. leadership as part of a speaker series hosted by the Claus M. Halle Institute for Global Learning**.

Mr. Siv left the White House in 1993 and worked in the private sector until 2001, when the second President Bush nominated him as 28th ambassador to the United Nations' Economic and Social Council.

The U.N. has been principally funded throughout its more than six decades by the U.S. Still today, U.N. initiatives generally can't get off the ground without action by the U.S., Mr. Siv said.

"In the U.N., if the U.S. doesn't get involved, nothing gets done," said Mr. Siv, who was the ambassador to the economic and social council when the United States decided to invade Iraq without the body's mandate and in spite of opposition from some key members like **France**.

When asked during the Q&A session how he "sold the war," Mr. Siv said he focused specifically on economic and cultural issues. After the event, he told **GlobalAtlanta** that the U.S.'s reputation is strong and hasn't been permanently harmed by the conflict.

But in the post-9/11 era, with the advent of globalization and the challenges of terrorism, human trafficking, war and economic crisis, Mr. Siv believes that the U.S. must begin to share leadership with the world, engaging with other nations as partners striving for mutual benefit.

All parties should engage one another with respect and dignity as human beings, not just as “stuffy” diplomats, said Mr. Siv, who during his time as ambassador introduced karaoke to his summit meetings with representatives of Southeast Asian nations.

“We should disagree, but we should not be disagreeable,” Mr. Siv said of dealing frankly with international conflicts.

In the interconnected age of Facebook, Twitter and other Internet technologies, the spread of democracy and freedom is inevitable, he added.

“I believe strongly that democracy and freedom are going to take root even without our leadership,” he said.

But with the help of allies and by engaging with opponents, the U.S. must help steer the process and “prioritize, because we can't do everything ourselves,” Mr. Siv said.

After his speech, Mr. Siv signed copies of his best-selling book, “Golden Bones: An Extraordinary Journey from Hell in Cambodia to a New Life in America.” In 2005, Mr. Siv followed in the footsteps of Presidents **Truman**, **Eisenhower**, **Johnson** and **Clinton** when he spoke at a celebration marking the 60th anniversary of the U.N.

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