

JIAP OBSERVATION

ENOUGH ALREADY WITH *HIGH NOON*

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The 1952 Oscar winning movie, *High Noon*, has been a theme of the first Bush-Koizumi meetings. Each man likes to describe the other as the film's hero, Gary Cooper. While the US press has ignored these references, the Japanese press and Koizumi emphasize them. The PM has mentioned these exchanges in nearly every one of his E-Mail magazines to the Japanese people. He was particularly proud of the *High Noon* poster given to him by the President during his last visit. The dark message, however, of this anti-McCarthy classic, may not be one that the Bush team intended to portray.

High Noon, condemned by John Wayne as being anti-American, tells the story of the stoic Marshal Kane [Gary Cooper] who delays his honeymoon to stay to defend an ungrateful and hostile town from a returning gang of 4 bad guys (the "four horsemen of the Apocalypse"). The movie is a civics lesson of disappointment and ingratitude. It is not a saga of heroic showdowns like those in *Shane* or *Gunsmoke*. If there is a hero in the movie, it is Amy, Kane's bride [Grace Kelly], who swallows her principles to save her husband.

Obsessed with doing the right thing of keeping the town from falling back into lawless chaos, Kane summarizes his plight to Howe, the old Marshall, who also refuses to help him. None of the townspeople he has protected over the years will assist him in the showdown: "Listen, the judge has left town, Harvey's [his deputy, Lloyd Bridges] quit, and I'm havin' trouble gettin' a deputy." The stalwart, stoic Kane begins to understand that he will be left alone. Howe responds realistically about the apathetic townspeople, each with excuses: "It figures. It's all happened too sudden. People gotta talk themselves into law and order before they do anything about it. Maybe because down deep they don't care. They just don't care."

Kane's deputy, Harvey, refuses to help him because Kane had refused to promote him to Marshall. Kane again refused when offered a trade for helping him with the bad guys. Kane's former mistress Helen, now the deputy's, brushes off Harvey's anger by comparing his youthful, emotional immaturity to Kane's grown-up, moral courage:

You're a good looking boy, you have big broad shoulders, but he is a man. It takes more than big broad shoulders to make a man, Harvey, and you have a long way to go. You know something? I don't think you will ever make it.

At Noon, the showdown begins. No one stands in the middle of Main Street to shoot the other. Instead, a vicious guerilla battle ensues in the empty town. Although Kane manages to kill two of the bad guys, he is wounded by a third. When third guy reloads, to finish off a fallen Kane, he is shot in the back and killed by Amy, his wife. Amy torn between her husband and her Quaker faith had run back from her departing train to help Kane. Previously, she had the following

conversation with Helen, Kane's sultry Spanish mistress: Helen: If Kane was my man, I'd never leave him like this. I'd get a gun. I'd fight. Amy: Why don't you? Helen: He is not my man. He's yours.

Kane then proceeds to hunt down and kill the last and baddest bad guy. The movie ends here, in silence, as no one in the village offers thanks and Kane [to the rage of John Wayne and many others] throws down in the dirt his Marshal's badge. Kane and Amy then ride out of town in their wagon.

There are indeed some interesting foreign policy analogies here. But, what is the message that Koizumi should make of this movie? Who is Bush? And who is Koizumi? Who wins? Maybe the White House should take some time and watch the Dickens classic *Great Expectations*. Here, the viewer learns that you cannot always know who your benefactor is; it may be someone you least expect.

For the full High Noon story line see: <http://www.filmsite.org/high.html>