

commentary

from other pens...

Bush officials seek closer ties with Japan

By George Gedda

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Japan’s foreign minister passed through town almost unnoticed this week, a visit almost as quiet as Japan’s return to primacy on America’s foreign policy horizon after years of relative obscurity.

The shift is not surprising given the number of senior Bush administration officials who believe that the U.S.-Japan defense alliance has been neglected for too long.

They include Richard Armitage, the State Department’s second ranking official; James Kelly, who heads the department’s East Asia bureau, Paul Wolfowitz, the Pentagon’s No. 2 official; and Torkel Patterson, the top Asia hand at the National Security Council.

Some supporters of strong U.S.-Japan ties were taken aback in 1998 when then-President Clinton spent nine days in China without touching base in either Tokyo or Seoul while he was in the neighborhood.

“This elevated the Chinese to a position where they took priority,” says Balbina Hwang, a policy analyst at the conservative Heritage Foundation. “It sent a damaging message to our allies. There is a lot of repair work to be done.”

Secretary of State Colin Powell moved quickly to set a new tone.

He met with Japan’s foreign minister less than a week after taking office. Later, then-Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori became one of the first foreign leaders to be received by Bush. His successor prime minister, Junichiro Koizumi, is due here at the end of the month.

The administration has been far less inclined than its predecessor to recommend measures to revive Japan’s subpar economy. The inclination to prescribe remedies caused resentment in Tokyo.

Thus far, the changes in administration this year in both Washington and Tokyo have not yet yielded major substantive changes. But Armitage, Kelly, Wolfowitz and Patterson all saw the need for greater dynamism in U.S.-Japanese relations.

A report they, along with other experts, wrote recently and saw published by the National Defense University included the following thoughts:

—The time has arrived for renewed attention to improving, reinvigorating, and refocusing the U.S.-Japan alliance.

—The potential for conflict in Asia is lowered dramatically by a visible and “real” U.S.-Japan defense relationship.

—The use of bases granted by Japan allows the United States to affect the security environment from the Pacific to the Persian Gulf.

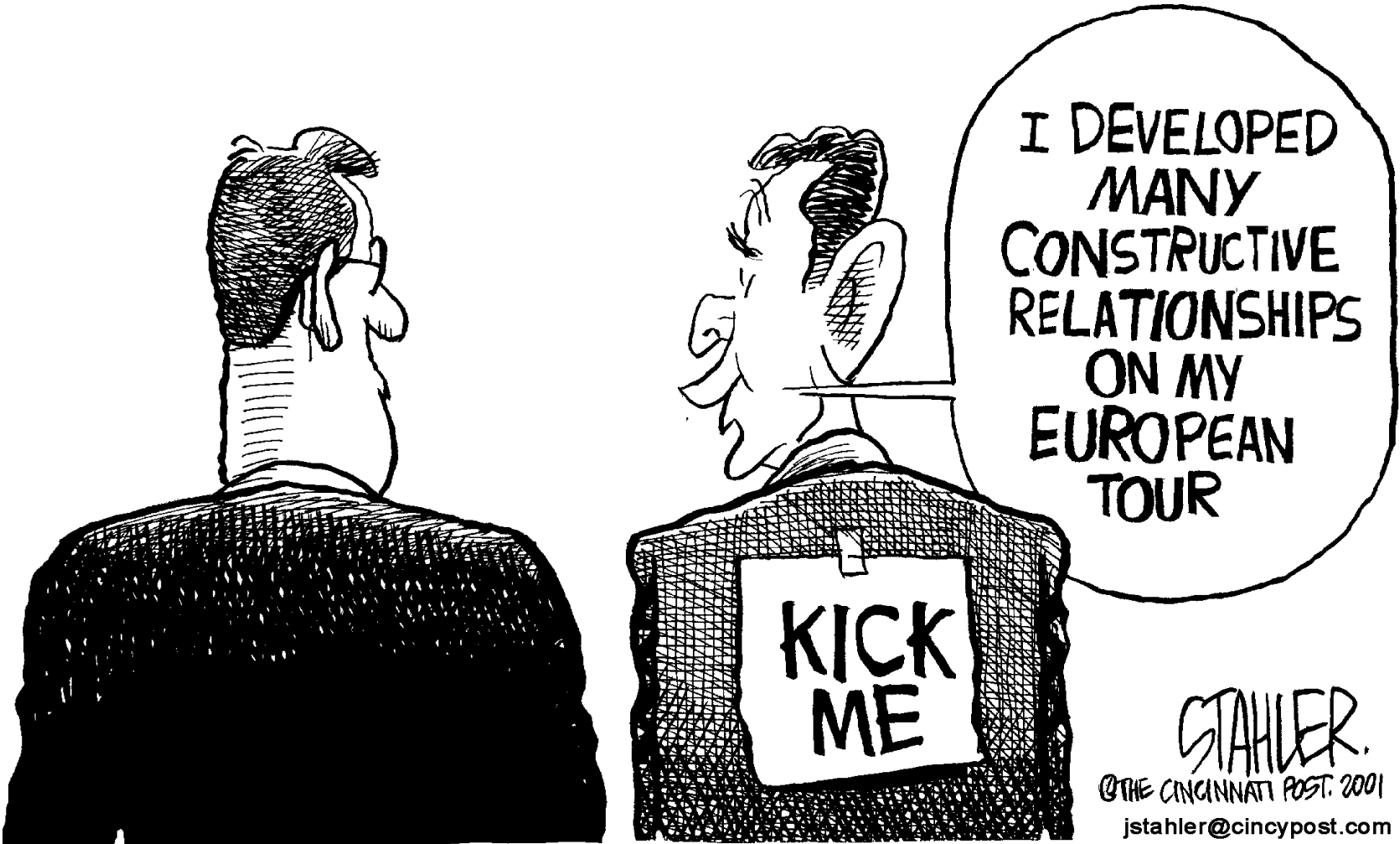
—Japan’s prohibition against collective self-defense is a constraint on alliance cooperation. Lifting this prohibition would allow for closer and more efficient security cooperation.

In another recently published report, Hwang explains the practical consequences these limits have on Japan’s ability to cooperate with the U.S. military.

“If a U.S. warship conducting exercises in the Sea of Japan were attacked by enemy fire, the Japanese defense forces would be prohibited ... from coming to its aid; if the Japanese ship were attacked by enemy fire, however, the United States would be obliged under its bilateral treaty alliance to assist the Japanese.”

These constitutional constraints were imposed in the aftermath of World War II and remain in effect.

EDITOR’S NOTE — George Gedda covers the State Department for The Associated Press.



Fathers don't always know best

After a long weekend with their parents at Camp David, Jenna and Barbara Bush probably learned a thing or two about responsibility and discretion. (They probably learned, too, that if they’re going to party, they ought to do it someplace other than Austin.)

Frankly, though, I am more interested in what their father might have learned. I hope he learned that the adolescent mind is different from yours and mine.

Inside a teen-ager’s head, the brain becomes the Wile E. Coyote of bodily organs. It separates time into two categories: now and not now. It fails to register that the tunnel up ahead is the same one that turned into a brick wall last time and the time before that.

Thus, in the adolescent brain, possible consequences such as humiliating tabloid headlines, a court appearances and forfeiture of the family Neiman Marcus card aren’t always enough to keep a kid from doing something stupid. All that matters is NOW,NOW,NOW.

“There’s a lesson in here about academic education, and moral education, and how kids learn,” says Joe DiPrisco, longtime educator and co-author with Mike Riera of “Field Guide to the American Teenager: Appreciating the Teenager You Live With.”

“It’s messy. It’s not easy. None of this is black and white. Bush probably did everything he could as a father and this still happened.”

If Bush’s own daughter, a young woman with all the breeding, grooming and education of the upper crust, can make this kind of mistake — after having gone through a similar experience just a few weeks earlier — then maybe the president will realize that adolescent drug use, pregnancy and crime won’t be solved by implementing tougher laws and simplistic prevention programs.

“Just say no’ doesn’t start to cover it,” Riera



joan ryan

• commentary

says.

I wonder if Bush made any connections between the complications of raising his own teen-agers and the complications of raising any teen-ager. I wonder if it occurred to him that a rough patch in a teen-ager’s life doesn’t define who that teen-ager is, just as his daughters’ current troubles don’t define who they are.

In the blink of an eye, Jenna is one offense away from a possible six-month jail term, thanks to a tough underage drinking law her father signed while governor of Texas. Does this mean Jenna is a bad kid? Hardly. Would tossing her in jail solve her inability to make wiser decisions? Of course not; she’s 19. So why do we think it will solve the problems of adolescents who are still legally children?

Juvenile crime often is born of a child making bad decisions and taking stupid risks. In the privileged environment of the Bush twins, the bad decisions and stupid risks might take the form of drinking margaritas at a restaurant. For a kid shaped by the environment of the inner city, the bad decisions and stupid risks might take the form of selling crack cocaine, vandalizing a school building, or beating up a classmate as part of a gang initiation.

The adolescent impulses driving the inner-city kid and the Bush twins are likely to be remarkably similar. The middle- and upper-class kids deal with their mistakes by going to psychologists and drug rehab paid for by their parents’ insurance compa-

nies. Then they go on to college and soon their juvenile records are destroyed, as if they never existed.

The inner-city kid, by contrast, likely will end up at juvenile hall with minimal counseling services to help him make better decisions in the future. If the kid is unlucky, he ends up in adult jail. Instead of counseling, he gets a solid education from his new roommates, which will virtually ensure long-term relationship with the penal system.

Under such law-and-order leaders as the president and his brother Jeb, the governor of Florida, children considerably younger than the Bush twins are being treated as if their brains and emotional impulses are as mature as an adult’s. Young teens are landing in courts where rehabilitation has lost out to punishment, where the difference between adults and children is aggressively ignored.

In the 1990s, 41 states amended their juvenile justice laws to make it easier to try children in criminal court. Last year, according to one report, about 18,000 kids spent time in adult prisons. About 3,500 of them were tossed into the general prison population.

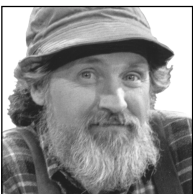
More states are implementing mandatory sentencing for juvenile offenders that gives judges little leeway in addressing the particular needs of a child.

“What Bush has a chance to do is avoid the black-and-white thinking,” Riera says. “What he can do for his daughters is help them get the most from this experience, to shorten their learning curve. What he does now might not change them overnight, but it can help shape them over the next few years.”

No doubt Bush, like any parent in his position, has learned a few things as a father these past few weeks. I wonder what he learned as a president.

Joan Ryan is a columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle. Send comments to her in care of this newspaper or send her e-mail at joanryan@sfgate.com.

I've grown accustomed to your flaws



red green

• north of forty

We went over to a friend’s house recently to watch a hockey game on TV and we were overwhelmed with the quality of their picture. We immediately realized that their TV looking so good must mean that our TV looks really bad. We just never noticed. That’s because over time you get used to whatever it is you have to look at, day in and day out —ugly furniture or a bad wardrobe. You learn to accept and make peace with it.

I think life is a lot like that. If you can resist the pressure to change things to suit someone else, they will eventually get used to it. And this applies equally to your professional and personal life. If you have the mental toughness to hold your ground through the first years of a job or a marriage when your boss is trying to maximize your productivity and your wife is trying to maximize your compatibility, soon, just like what happened with our TV, they will eventually not notice your poor reception. You just have to make sure they’re never exposed to other TVs or workers or husbands.

By the way, our new television set has a great picture.

NEVER SAY NEVER

As I mature (ripen?), I notice that Nature has set me up to start liking things I used to hate and vice versa. As a kid I never liked steak and potatoes. I

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The Goodland Daily News

(USPS No. 222-460. ISSN 0893-0562)

Member: Kansas Press Association

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Published daily except Saturday and Sunday and the day observed for New Year’s Day, Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day, at 1205 Main St., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

Periodicals postage paid at Goodland, Kan. 67735; entered at the Goodland, Kan., Post Office under the Act of Congress of March 8, 1878.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Goodland Daily News, 1205 Main St., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

TELEPHONE: (785) 899-2338. Editorial e-mail: daily@nwkansas.com. Advertising questions can be sent to: gdnadv@nwkansas.com

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SUBSCRIPTIONS: In Sherman County and adjacent counties: three months, \$22; six months, \$38; 12 months, \$72. By mail in Kansas, Colorado: three months, \$ 28; six months, \$50; 12 months, \$95. (All tax included.) Out of area, weekly mailing of five issues: three months, \$25; six months, \$40; 12 months, \$75.

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