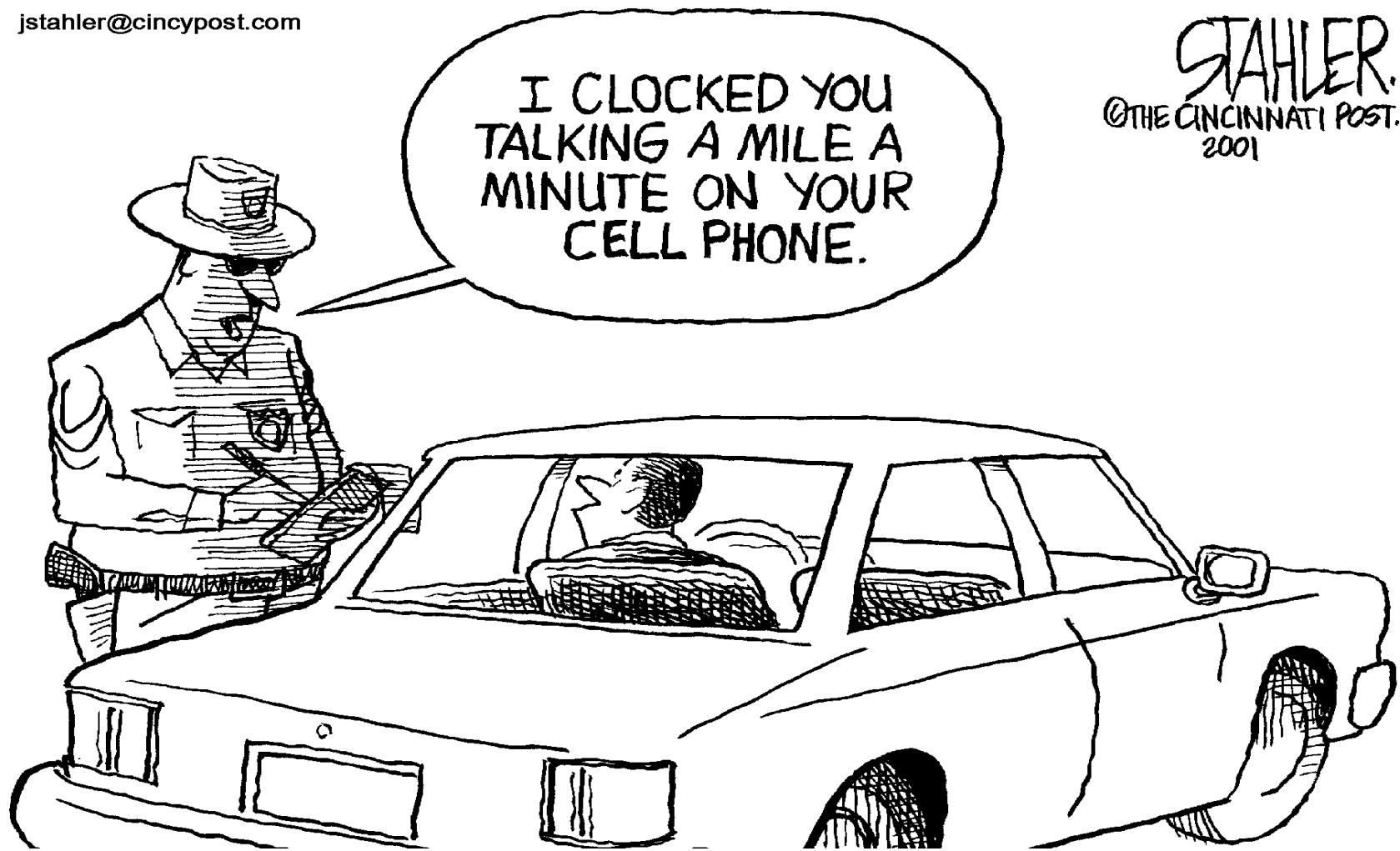


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commentary

from other pens...

Macedonia puzzle: U.S. get in or stay out?

By George Gedda

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Slobodan Milosevic had his hand in the turmoil in Slovenia, Bosnia, Croatia and Kosovo over the past decade. At least he can't be blamed for the current Balkan strife, in Macedonia.

Unlike the earlier conflicts, in which many believe Serbia's Milosevic was calling the shots, there is no sinister face that can be attached to the turmoil in Macedonia. Likewise, there is no consensus as to the how deeply involved the United States should be.

Most Americans would have trouble finding the Vermont-sized country of 2 million on a map. American ties to the country — political, economic and ethnic — are thin at best. So should the United States really care if some members of the country's aggrieved ethnic Albanian minority are taking up arms against the elected government?

Macedonia's government believes the rebels are intent on carving out a "Greater Albania" that would involve Albania and portions of Macedonia and Kosovo, a neighboring province of Serbia.

European and on occasion American envoys have been showing up in the Macedonian capital of Skopje to press for a political solution.

There is a let-the-Europeans-handle-it mood in Washington. With troop commitments in Bosnia and Kosovo, the administration has been reluctant to get involved as the country has slid toward mayhem.

About 700 U.S. troops are in Macedonia, but they are there mainly to provide logistical support for the U.S. forces in Kosovo. The Macedonia conflict has become internationalized to a degree as the Albanian fighters rely increasingly on their brethren across the Albanian border for materiel support.

When U.S. personnel were used to protect a convoy carrying armed Albanian rebels last week, Pentagon officials acknowledged the mission involved risk but denied it was a start of deeper involvement.

Days later, however, President Bush said "no option" was being ruled out concerning use of U.S. troops in Macedonia.

At present, American troops would become involved only to help enforce a disarmament agreement as part of a broader settlement. All told, 3,000 NATO troops would take part, the great majority European.

John Hulsman, a European expert at the Heritage Foundation in Washington, said the administration is wise to limit the U.S. role.

"The Europeans should take the lead," he said. The greater the political and military involvement of the United States, the more likely American peacekeepers would become targets because of "unrestrained animosity" in the area, Hulsman said. He dismissed suggestions events in Macedonia will have an impact far beyond Macedonia's borders.

Two former U.S. ambassadors to the United Nations, Jeane Kirkpatrick and Richard Holbrooke, are alarmed by the upheaval.

"Much stronger NATO action is required before violence there escalates further and overwhelms voices of moderation among ethnic Albanians and Macedonians," they wrote in a recent opinion piece.

"Macedonia's descent into civil war would call into question national borders across the Balkans, reward forces of violence across the region, threaten countries such as Bulgaria and even create tensions within the alliance."

NATO assistance to Macedonia generally has been limited to providing training to the Macedonian Army and intercepting Albanian rebel arms shipments on the Kosovo side of the border.

Daniel Serwer, a Balkan expert at the U.S. Institute of Peace, wants a more pugnacious approach. "We know from bitter history that failing to stop things early on leads to much worse problems later on and the need for U.S. intervention," he says. "Prevention is cheaper than the cure."

EDITOR'S NOTE — George Gedda has covered foreign affairs for The Associated Press since 1968.

Not yet ready for those bundles of joy

I graduated from college and got married. We all know what's supposed to come next. Children should be arriving any time into our lives. Everyone wants to know when.

Sometimes I say that maybe after we have insurance we'll think about it. Or, maybe when Levi gets out of school and we both have jobs. That seems like an OK time.

I honestly do want children. Right now though I want to go to the lake, shopping at midnight and on long road trips. I want uninterrupted showers and the privacy the bathroom brings.

I don't want to have to fix vegetables with our meals or carry a huge purse with everything in it. I want to buy a bedroom set instead of diapers and a new car instead of baby food and blankets.

When visiting, I want to be able to relax and enjoy a conversation without having to keep an eye on the young'uns. And I don't want to think of an-



debra turner

• just beginning

swers to the question "why."

I'm selfish and I admit it. Mothers don't have time to be selfish.

Little faces peer into bathrooms, bedrooms and anywhere else you could try to hide.

Clothes get smeared with questionable things right as your walking out the door. Instead of 10 minutes, bedtime can last up to an hour. Laundry piles get larger and the grocery bill goes up.

I will admit the rewards of having children probably outweigh any inconveniences, but I'm not

willing to take on the responsibility just yet.

Don't get me wrong. I like Disney movies, but I really am not at a point in my life where I want to watch them two to three times a day. Nor do I want to spend the morning singing with Barney or finding Blues Clues.

I used to baby-sit my little sisters not too long ago and it's all still fresh in my mind. I remember all the hugs, kisses and laughter, but it's Barney that haunts my dreams.

Our mothers never ask about grandchildren like you'd think they would. They both think we have plenty of time. Maybe it's because our siblings have already taken care of having the grandchildren thing.

I think they realize we need time for ourselves.

So as of now we're living on our own timetable, and for the those of you who want to ask: Not for awhile.

The road to geezerdom



red green

• north of forty

As we age, the line between a "with-it" middle-aged guy and an old geezer starts to blur. No way you're a geezer, but maybe some of your friends are showing the telltale signs. They've started to use phrases like, "I remember when they delivered that with a horse," or "I see bellbottoms are back in style," or "Computers make your brain go soft."

Computers do make your brain go soft, but it takes a geezer to notice. Not that there's anything wrong with being a geezer ... some of the best lawn ornaments and clothespin recipe cardholders are made by geezers. But you're not ready to join a club where the dues are paid in balls of old string ... at least, not yet. No, you've got lots of years on the fast track before you hit geezerdom. But what do you do if a few of your friends aren't so lucky? You have to make them feel they're still with it. If they're headed for the mall in their bedroom slippers, wear yours too, so they don't feel out of place. Admire their hotel soap collection ... show them yours. And never, ever let them know they've become geezers. They might do the same for you someday.

GOOD CHEMISTRY

When you were a teen-ager, boy, whenever you'd see a good-looking girl, your chemical system would go into toxic-dump mode, causing a brain core meltdown. You were the amorous equivalent of Chernobyl living in the middle of your own private Love Canal. Now that we're older, we realize it's a threat to our health to have

a runaway chain reaction to somebody really attractive, especially if your wife's watching. No, we're smarter now. We've turned the Bunsen burner down low enough that we don't act like idiots all the time. Now, that's not to say we older guys don't ever get chemical or physical. It's just that we know if you're going to start a fire, all you need is a match, and there's a pretty good chance you found that match quite a while ago.

LIFE'S 'BARGAINS'

Now that we have the benefit of experience, we realize that although a great many of life's baubles are overpriced, there have been some great bargains along the way. Here are a few that come to mind:

- Bus fare home.
- Life jackets.
- Birth control pills.
- Kaopectate.
- Voice mail.
- Sunscreen.

YOUR AND YOUR TOOL

I'd like to talk to all you middle-aged guys about the secret magazines you keep hidden in the bath-

room or stuffed under your mattress. I'm talking about the specialty tool catalogues with their flex-neck screwdrivers, brass plumb bobs and right angle reamers. Is it possible that you put more time and effort into your handyman toolbox than you do with your emotional toolbox? If you've got state-of-the-art tools to work on your '74 Gremlin, but you're trying to keep your relationship in some kind of working order using the equivalent of a ball peen hammer and a bent nail, that's not good.

Think of your relationship as a physical structure in which you live. Maybe it's a lean-to or a semi-detached; might be a freehold; could even be a shack-up. But you have to ask yourself, "Am I heading for a bachelor apartment, or am I going to renovate?" You may actually have some tools that are holding you back. I'm talking about the hair-splitter, the heel-dragger and the oscillating truth-stretcher. The tools you need to make a relationship work aren't all that hard to come by. They just need to be flexible, and they need to last a long time. And when you order yours, ask for the high-sensitivity model with the conversation adapter.

QUOTE OF THE DAY: "I'm a lot smarter now than I was when I thought I was." — Red Green
Red Green is the star of "The Red Green Show," a television series seen in the U.S. on PBS and in Canada on the CBC Network, and the author of "The Red Green Book" and "Red Green Talks Cars: A Love Story."

Judge her engine, not her body work

I was trying on clothes a few weeks ago in a department store fitting room, a horror chamber that featured multiple full-length mirrors and lighting that met federal illumination standards for both microsurgery and nighttime highway repairs. I had locked the door, so I was startled when a stranger — a slightly doughy older woman in her underwear — suddenly appeared in the reflection of one of the mirrors. I whirled around to find, of course, that the stranger was me.

I know that the conditions in a fitting room tend to exaggerate one's "physical flaws." (In Beverly Hills medical circles, these are more commonly referred to as "deformities," or sometimes "my son Trevor's college education fund.") Still, I couldn't deny that I had, seemingly overnight, turned into Ma Joad.

This discovery coincided with the impending arrival of summer, when I would have to emerge from beneath the black clothes that had so effectively served my denial through the preceding eight months. Acres of my exposed flesh would soon be in proximity to women who wear beach sarongs for fashion rather than thigh cover-ups, women whose arms didn't flap like fish bellies when they hailed a cab.

(These are the women who, in high school, had lifeguards for boyfriends and skin the color of caramel. We assured our own white selves they'd be wrinkled hags by 40. We are waiting patiently, Lord.)

So I accepted immediately when a friend invited me to spend a weekend with her at a Santa



joan ryan

• commentary

Barbara resort and spa — her treat. We'll be new women, she promised. We'll be like Dorothy and her pals getting washed, trimmed and fluffed by the Oz staff. I pictured us as cars going into the shop for a tune-up and detailing. I wanted no less than what my car gets: a little body work for the scratches and dents, some polish, maybe a bit of tightening under the hood.

It turned out we weren't going to just any spa. My friend had booked us into Bacara, the trendiest new retreat for the beautiful and famous, a place where the staff is so discreet and the guest quarters so perfectly designed that Julia Roberts could be staying around the corner and I'd never know. (Which really ticked me off. I had hoped for nameplates.)

Within hours of arrival, I found myself naked on a padded table, my body covered in an oatmeal mixture that had dried on to me like baked mud. The massage therapist was scrubbing my arms and legs with a loofah, removing the mixture as if scraping barnacles off a hull. Later, I lay on another table with heated river stones on my back as the therapist massaged my head and neck and, in a mesmerizing whisper, guided my stress through my organs and muscles

and out the webbing between my fingers. I bought into all of it.

For two days, we lived as if we weren't ourselves. We wore fluffy robes and bathing suits. We sat by the pool overlooking the ocean and ordered lemonade from young attendants in white shirts and slacks. The guests around us talked of "box office" and real estate and Henry Kissinger's new book. I wore sunglasses and dressed in linen for dinner.

I knew, of course, that I didn't look different. My legs didn't grow longer, as I had hoped. The dents and scratches hadn't disappeared. But an odd, counterintuitive thing happened on this island of beautiful people.

I stopped minding the flaws so much.

The truth is, the beautiful people had flaws, too, of course. And the therapists scrubbing, soaking and kneading our bodies talked to the way we felt, not how we looked, subscribing to the theory that beauty is fluid, flowing from the outside in as well as from the inside out.

Before I left Bacara, I stood in front of the mirror and took stock. These legs carry me from Point A to Point B. This skin keeps my organs inside, which is what, at the end of the day, I want my skin to do. These arms can cradle a baby and push a wheelbarrow. OK, maybe I'm a Pacer instead of Jaguar. I'm becoming OK with that. A Pacer might not turn as many heads, but the maintenance is a breeze.

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