

commentary

from other pens...

Problems proliferate as Bush-Putin meet

By George Gedda

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon is feeling upbeat about the direct hit it scored in a missile defense test high over the Pacific. The Bush administration is less pleased about another direct hit — the diplomatic one Russia scored against Secretary of State Colin Powell's Iraq policy. Missile defense and Iraq are playing havoc with U.S.-Russian relations and will pose a test for President Bush and Russian President Vladimir Putin when they meet Sunday in Genoa, Italy. Powell was discussing the same issues Wednesday in Rome during a meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov.

The proliferating problems between the two countries make one wonder about the durability of the chemistry Bush and Putin showed when they met last month in Slovenia for their inaugural chitchat.

With Bush at his side, Putin spoke of the "very high level of trust between the two of us. I must say the president is a nice person to talk to."

Bush said of Putin: "I looked the man in the eye. I found him to be very straightforward and trustworthy."

Bush made the comment even as Powell was expressing "astonishment" that Russia, alone among permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, was thwarting his plan to make sanctions against Iraq less onerous for Iraqi civilians and more effective in blocking imports that could be used by Iraq's military.

Powell says he cannot fathom why Russia is providing aid and comfort to a regime that may be hell-bent on developing weapons of mass destruction.

Although Powell says he's unsure what the Iraqis are up to, an article in the current issue of Commentary magazine is not reassuring on this point. The article says U.N. weapons inspectors, before their departure from Iraq in 1998, prepared confidential reports recounting Iraqi efforts to build weapons forbidden by the United Nations.

Throughout the '90's, in violation of the U.N. embargo and in the teeth of the U.N. inspection regime, the Iraqis imported suspect goods from at least 20 countries, the article said, quoting from one report.

On Iraq's shopping list were "turnkey facilities, full-sized production lines, industrial know-how, high-tech spare parts and raw materials," the article quoted the report as saying.

Will Bush confront Putin on this issue? And how will Putin respond? Putin, no doubt, has questions for Bush. Russian officials claim the American administration has been all over the lot on missile defense, leaving them scratching their heads.

The United States wants to move ahead on missile defense, while Russia wants both sides to stick with the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. It imposes strict limits on missile defenses.

At a meeting in Moscow on Monday, Putin and Chinese President Jiang Zemin put on paper their joint opposition to Bush's missile defense plan, warning it could trigger a new arms race.

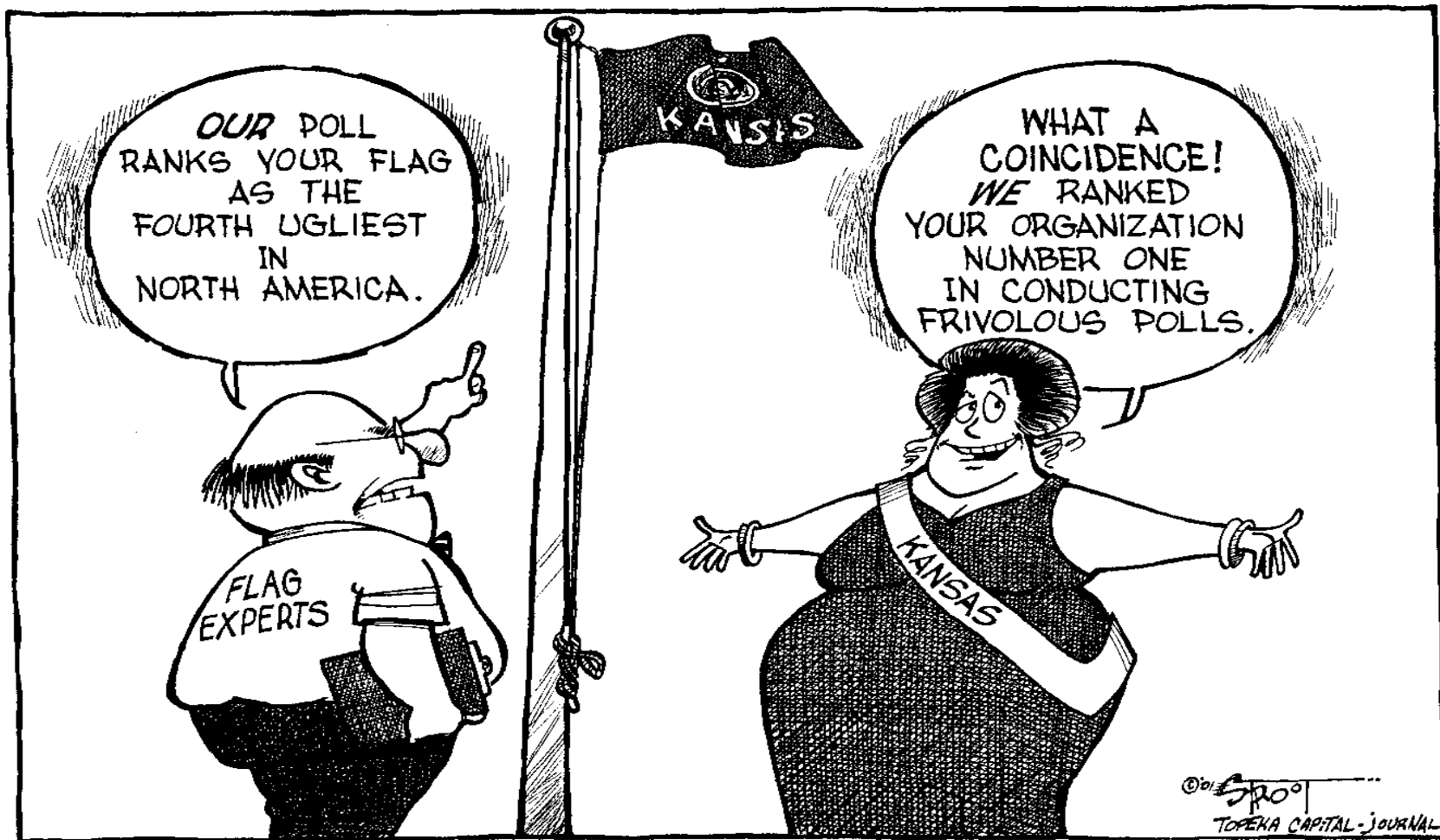
Illustrative of Moscow's confusion over Bush's policy were these comments last week from Russia's defense minister, Sergei Ivanov, in response to statements by U.S. officials:

"Some say they are withdrawing from the treaty. Others say they are not withdrawing. Still others say the treaty will not be violated. Therefore, there is no point in reacting to such very contradictory statements."

In some ways, relations seemed friendlier during the latter stages of old Soviet Union, a time when the two sides were able to conclude arms control agreements and cooperate in ending proxy wars in southern Africa and Central America.

But who knows? Perhaps the "straightforward and trustworthy" Putin can cut some deals Sunday with "nice person" Bush, taking advantage of the "very high level of trust between the two."

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



Men, women, apples and oranges

I envy the young women in my office. They are so comfortable being women. They show up to work in skirts and blouses that don't hide the fact they have legs and breasts. Lace is not out of the question. As one late-20s, up-and-coming editor said to me, "I like girly things."

When I entered the business, I drank scotch and wore trousers and flat shoes and took to heart the advice not to write a "woman's" sports column because no one would accept me. Without thinking too hard about it, I strove to be a little man, which made perfect sense at the time. Men served as the sole model of human competence in the workplace.

This attempt, it strikes me now, was like a cat striving to be a dog. It smacked of self-loathing, even if we didn't think of it that way. It suggested that femaleness was something to overcome. For decades, we held to the notion that there were no differences between men and women other than the obvious physical ones. The cultural and sociological ideal was sameness, which could be achieved simply by changing laws, enlightening schools and redirecting parents.

We rarely stopped to ask the next logical questions: What does sameness mean, exactly? How would it look? Were the two sexes trying to become some sort of third gender that was neither male nor female?

The answer, of course, was no. We were going



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• commentary

to achieve sameness — and thus, somehow, equality — by everyone's being men.

Now the cloak of gender politics is lifting, and underneath is gads more pink than we've seen in a while.

Three major publishers have released books that examine what it means to be female, from the neurons in our brains to the cycles that regulate our bodies. Time Magazine put the topic on its cover. Medical seminars on gender-specific biology that attracted only a handful of doctors four years ago now fill to capacity. Researchers are feeling free to explore the science behind Venus and Mars without being accused of setting women back.

"What my book does, I think, is say, 'Let's look at ourselves and not feel defensive,'" says Mill Valley writer Dianne Hale, author of "Just Like a Woman: How Gender Science is Redefining What Makes Us Female" (Bantam, 1999). Hale and the authors of the two similar books have been described as "femaleists," rather than feminists. There is no political agenda in the books, though they

probably would have been branded as sexist just 10 or 15 years ago.

"The social landscape has changed, so that now they can put these books out there without being lambasted," says Bay Area comedian Rob Becker.

A decade ago, when Becker first began performing "Defending the Caveman," his one-man show about hunter men and gatherer women, critics called it insensitive, stereotypical and out of touch. But audiences loved it. They recognized what Becker was saying: All the well-intentioned, politically correct theories in the world can't, and shouldn't try to, change evolutionary biology. The show became the longest-running one-man show in the history of Broadway and is still selling out in theaters across the country.

"What bothers me about people saying men should be like women, or women should be like men, or that everyone needs to be the same," Becker says, "is that what they're really saying is that we're not OK the way we are."

We're finally moving to the point when we can stop making comparisons altogether and understand that we are what we are. Then, when someone asks who is better, men or women, we'll answer as Samuel Johnson did: Which man? Which woman?

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A man's garage is his castle

My wife says our garage is an unsightly mess. I disagree. Yes, it contains a substantial array of unfinished projects and seemingly worthless materials, but all of that is completely out of sight, or it would be if I could get the door to close. But contrary to popular opinion, garage clutter isn't a bad thing. If you're in the middle of a mess, you're in the middle of history. It's the story of everything that has happened in that garage since the words "I'll get to it later" were first spoken. Clutter is by far the easiest organizational system to learn. As long as you have a floor, you don't need expensive storage cabinets. A clean garage means wasting time remembering where the tools are. A messy garage means the tools are lying there rusting where you can see them. And you never know what you'll create when you leave stuff lying around. The guy who invented Chia Pets probably had a bunch of busted lawn gnomes piled up near some spilled grass seed under a leaky roof. And there are lots more million-dollar ideas lying around out there. All I have to do is sort through the clutter. I'll get to it later.

MY PIECE OF THE ROCK

I currently do not have any life insurance. Now, I'm certainly not recommending that for any of you. It's just that my 20-year term insurance ran out, and when they offered to renew at five times the premium, I declined. To me, there is something



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• north of forty

fundamentally ironic about life insurance. They make us have a complete medical exam, and they have tons of statistical data, so they have a pretty good idea of how long we're going to live. But instead of treating that as good news, we bet against them by taking out a policy. We're each thinking, "There's no way I'm going to live another 20 years. This is the easiest money I'll ever make." And we're not basing it on any medical or statistical information. We just think we know ourselves better than they do, and we own a lot of power tools. Well, here I am 20 years later, and I lost the bet. Now, I know that when you're starting out and raising a family, you need a safety net for your loved ones just in case. But I'm through that phase. My plan now is to apply for a huge policy, go through all the medicals, and then, if they approve my life insurance, that proves I've got a lot of years left. And this time, instead of betting against them, I'll reject the policy and use the premium money to take a vacation every year. Besides, if I don't have life insurance, there's less of a chance that my

wife will kill me. At least, not for the insurance money.

A CRY FOR HELP

We middle-aged guys are pretty rugged. If we nail a finger to the workbench, take a flying tire in the face, or even shoot off a toe, you're not going to hear any complaints from us. But get a cold or the flu, and we fold like a cheap awning. Believe it or not, it's all part of the manly art of being manly. Every man likes to pretend he's indestructible. He'll never admit he can't lift his end of the piano, or he can't climb that roof, or this is the first time he's used an arc welder. That's where the trouble starts — just ask the nurse in the emergency ward. A cold is no big deal, but it's our way of saying, "Hey, I need help" when we don't really need help, so we don't have to say, "Hey, I need help" when we really do need help. If we could get help without asking, it would simultaneously protect our egos and prevent hospital overcrowding.

QUOTE OF THE DAY: "I like long walks, especially when they are taken by people who annoy me." — 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."

Addictions change your life

I'm addicted. The feeling creeps up on me before I have time to fight it off. It doesn't matter what time it is or where I'm at.

I think about it all the time. I try to push it from my mind and concentrate on other things but it seeps in.

In grabs hold until I give into the sinful pleasure. It didn't used to be like this. I could take it or leave it. Either way it didn't matter. When I saw other people partaking I didn't long to join them. Just recently is when it started. One day I just thought about it and it seemed like a good idea. One time and I was hooked.

So many other times I'd done the same thing and it never had that affect on me.

I don't think I realized at that moment how much my life would change. The way it would control my life. The guilty feeling I would carry around unable to shake.

My husband is very understanding. I think as long as it doesn't interfere with our daily lives or get too costly he won't object.

It could have something to do with the weather. That's when it first started. That's when I had to succumb to the cravings.

I started with chocolate on a regular cone. Soon



debra turner

• just beginning

I was into cookie dough. Now I've gone so far as strawberry on a waffle cone. The other day I had a chocolate dipped cone from Dairy Queen. I just can't stop myself.

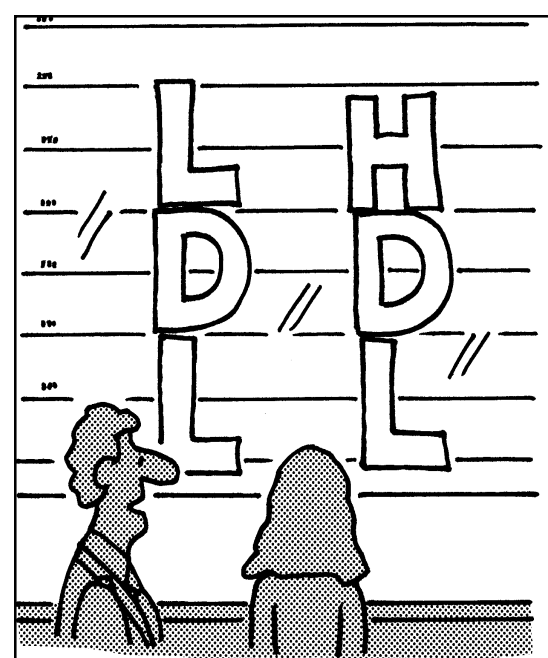
It's not the ice cream and it's not really the cone but the combination of both. The way they play together in my mouth. The joining of smooth and crunchy. The cold sweetness that leaves my lips cold.

Now don't get me wrong, I do have some will power. I limit myself to one a day. I know what would happen to my body if I didn't.

I'm taking preventative measures. All of you that have seen me at the pool swimming laps or walking my dog, it's not really because I enjoy it. No, it's so I can keep eating ice cream cones every day.

Maybe when the weather changes once again I'll get tired of my latest addiction. But, until then, don't get in my way in the freezer section.

berry's world



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