

commentary

from other pens...

U.S. staying in Asia for the long haul

Two days after a late January referendum in Uzbekistan that was widely criticized by human rights groups, a top State Department official visiting the former Soviet republic promised a tripling of U.S. assistance to \$160 million.

The scene was reminiscent of the Cold War era when the United States routinely set up alliances with regimes which, while not democratic, at least were anti-communist. Zaire, Somalia and a slew of erstwhile autocracies in Latin America come to mind.

A similar pattern is now developing as the United States seeks allies in the war on terrorism. Most notable are the handful of Central Asian countries, Uzbekistan included, whose geostrategic importance have increased since Sept. 11. Other countries in the region enjoying increased U.S. attention are Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. All have backed the campaign against terrorism.

The Bush administration's concern is that Islamic radicals, no longer welcome in newly pro-Western Afghanistan, will try to set up shop in nearby Central Asian countries or make common cause with existing fundamentalist movements.

Another lure for the U.S. is the possibility of new energy investments in the former Soviet republics, especially oil-rich Kazakhstan.

American troops are scattered in much of Central Asia. Officials expect to have continuing military cooperation in the region but there are no plans for long-term U.S. military presence.

The Bush administration appears committed to assisting these countries in other ways, including democratic and economic development. All are poorer than they were during the era of Soviet control.

In Kyrgyzstan on Tuesday, U.S. and Kyrgyz forces launched nine days of simulated anti-terrorism exercises, part of a U.S. effort to help the desperately poor country deal with Islamic extremists.

Coinciding with the maneuvers was a U.S. Embassy statement criticizing the arrest of a Kyrgyz opposition lawmaker and other infringements on freedom.

None of the Central Asian countries has acquired more importance than Uzbekistan. Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld and Secretary of State Colin Powell have visited Uzbekistan. In the aftermath of Sept. 11, the United States deployed about 1,000 troops in southern Uzbekistan near the Afghan border.

President Islam Karimov, who has run Uzbekistan since the late Soviet period, apparently senses the United States won't be too much of a stickler for democratic norms.

On Jan. 27, he held a referendum in which 91 percent of Uzbeks backed an extension of his term from five to seven years. The fraudulent trappings surrounding the vote were such that the Bush administration did not bother to send a monitor.

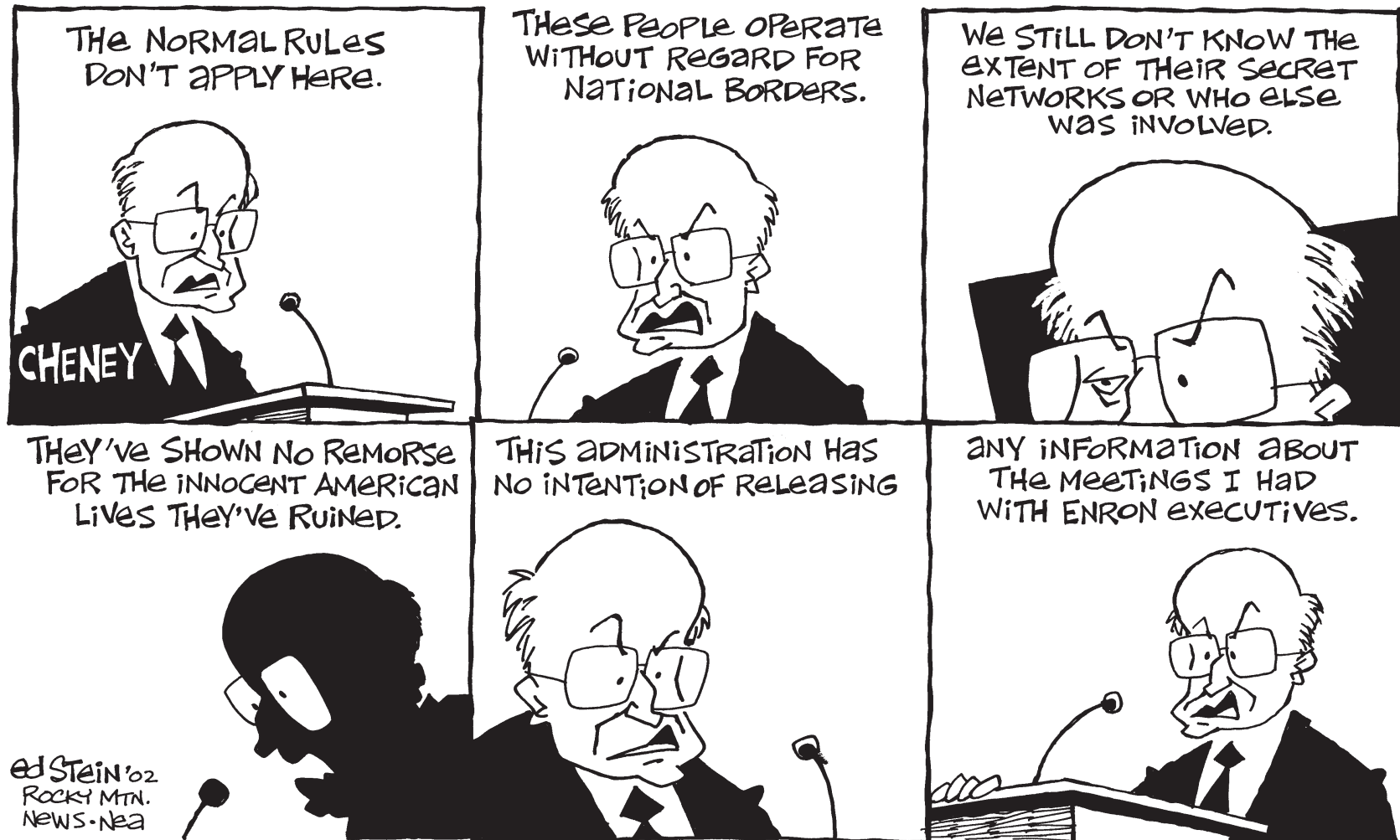
Elizabeth Jones, who heads the State Department's Europe and Eurasia bureau, showed up in Tashkent, the capital, and announced the generous aid package two days after the referendum. She also promised higher aid levels in the years to come. Jones did not ignore the referendum, reiterating Bush administration criticism and calling for free elections.

Human rights problems in Uzbekistan are widespread. Says Elizabeth Anderson, who monitors Central Asia for Human Rights Watch: "Torture is a systemic problem in Uzbekistan." Thousands of opposition figures, mostly Islamic radicals, are detained. There is no free press.

Sen. Joseph Lieberman, D-Conn., last month said, "The state of democracy and human rights matters to us, and unless Uzbekistan continues to move in that direction there will be limits on the support we can give."

Neither Uzbekistan, Tajikistan nor Kyrgyzstan produces drugs but all three have served as conduits for Afghan heroin and other narcotics earmarked for Russia and Europe. The Bush administration is helping all three combat the problem.

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



Teams, fans should be proud of conduct

I haven't been covering Goodland sports teams for long, but I have been impressed with the level of sportsmanship shown by both players and fans.

When a Goodland basketball player comes out of a game, his teammates stand and applaud, even if he didn't do too well. Every player, every time. None of the teams we have played show this same level of camaraderie.

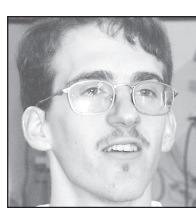
Oh, some of the players might stand, like in the Hays game Saturday night, or the whole team might stand after an outstanding player fouls out, like Colby did at the beginning of January, but never have I seen another entire team stand and applaud every player, star or scrub.

Goodland fans and parents also show remarkable restraint. I mean, come on, these are their babies out there, getting mauled by malicious bullies, and getting a raw deal from refs who obviously failed their last eye exams. I know my mother would be yelling her throat raw if it was her baby out there.

But our fans seem to be there to enjoy the game. They realize refs sometimes make mistakes, and it is just a game.

There are always a few hotheads, though. Any group of more than three people is going to have a loud-mouth. Fact of nature. But our hotheads are nowhere near as bad as some of the things I've heard come out of the mouths of opposing fans.

At the Orange and Black Tournament in Colby,



doug stephens

● wisdom from babes

the McCook fans really blasted the officials.

"Hey stripes, call it at the other end."
"That's six to one (on fouls) ref, call 'em even."
"Call 'em both ways, zebra."
"Ah, ref! You guys STINK!"

When Atwood came to town in January to play our boys, they brought a faithful, if obnoxious, bunch of fans with them.

"Open your eyes, stripes."
"What game are you watching?"
"Are you even paying attention?"

And more than one sarcastic, "Good call, ref." Come on, people. These referees don't get paid a whole lot of money to do this. They are doing their bit to support high school athletics. Fans who show up and root for their teams are doing the same, but when fans attack the refs, nobody is helped. If you were an official, would you be swayed by a belligerent crowd? If it was me, I'd probably punish the poor players for their annoying fans.

And in Kansas high school athletics, a team can be punished for their fans, but it isn't something

Goodland teams have to worry about.

All in all, our fans rise above such pettiness. Cow-boy fans cheer for their team, not against the other. Something which can be rare in the sports world.

It is not what I expected when I started covering Goodland sports.

When I was in high school in Phoenix, our sports teams almost had to have bodyguards. We didn't have anywhere close to the school spirit we have in this city, but the games and fans could get nasty. Players would get in fights on the court, fans would fight in the stands, opposing fans would spit on the players, and team buses would get vandalized. Even the marching band got into in a ruckus or two.

I will even reluctantly admit I was involved in a couple indiscretions, both as a player and a fan. It almost seemed mandatory that we get involved in skirmishes to uphold the honor of the school.

But Goodland teams maintain an almost professional attitude. They help opposing players off the floor, and don't get involved in shoving matches. They don't argue with the officials, or even give them too many dirty looks. There are always exceptions, in the heat of the moment even the most courteous player can lose his top, but on the average, Goodland teams show the best sportsmanship I have ever seen.

Whether the teams have rubbed off on the fans, or the fans rubbed off on the teams, it's a wonderful thing.

No more excuses



red green

● north of forty

I grew up in the '50s, when moms were homemakers and sons followed in their father's footsteps. Now, of course, women have taken their rightful place as men's equals in all areas of economic and social endeavor, and sons and daughters are much more likely to make their own footsteps than to follow anyone else's. While this has created a better world, it has required a fair bit of adjustment in the lives of most men. The biggest problem is that almost of all these developments have had the effect of taking away men's excuses. It's very hard to pretend your job is harder than it really is when you're wife has a more difficult job and does it better. It's also difficult to be king when you have no personal wealth and are not even the major wage earner in the home. And what happens to the male ego when you lose an arm-wrestling competition to your 11-year-old daughter? So instead of being the arbitrary authority figure and exercising the "because I said so" rule, a man must now present his case to the rest of his family with consideration and sensitivity. It's a tough one.

SPOT ON

Any of you men out there with a full, healthy head of hair can just skip over this part. For the rest of us, I'd like to talk briefly about bald spots. You can never be totally prepared for a bald spot. It creeps up on you slowly. It happens behind you, so you're usually the last one to find out about it. And it seems to have properties and characteristics that are entirely different from the hair it is replacing. It's almost like an alien life form of some kind. It's far more sensitive than the rest of your skin. It gets sunburned easily. It's the first thing to

feel the cold. Or the rain. It's the first thing to perspire when you're in trouble, or eating Mexican food, or both. This is probably because it is the youngest piece of skin on your body. Everything else may be 50 years old, but your bald spot has only been around for the last three. That's why it's so smooth and perky. So think about this: Instead of regarding your bald spot as an embarrassing sign of old age and rampant decay, think of it as sexy. They say that hair loss is due to excessive testosterone levels, so that's a good start. And we've already established that the area is smooth and extremely sensitive. So I'm suggesting that the bald spot is the ultimate erogenous zone. Such a powerful aphrodisiac that it is only given to the most manly of men. There, feel better about your bald spot now? Me, neither.

EVERYONE HAS BAGGAGE

Now that airport security has tightened and the guards are going through your luggage in your presence, you've got to be more careful about what you've got in there. Here are a few things to never take on an airplane trip:

- Underwear not intended for your gender. Or species.
- Poker chips.

- Pictures of women you're not married to.
- Whips, chains, or handcuffs.
- Home breathalyzer kit.
- Letter of reference from President Clinton.

JUST DO IT

Men of my generation have to learn how to compete with women without feeling bad about it. If a woman is going for the same job as you are, and you don't actively compete with her because you think it's "ungentlemanly," then you are sending out one of two bad messages: Either the message that you think she's going to get the job anyway just because she's a woman — which is an insult to her and the employer — or the message that you don't consider her an equal. That last one is the most dangerous because it will cause her to feel the same way about you. So get with the program. You must compete with women in the workplace. But remember, these people are professionals. Do not try this at home.

QUOTE OF THE DAY: "The word 'cliche' is used way too often." — 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."

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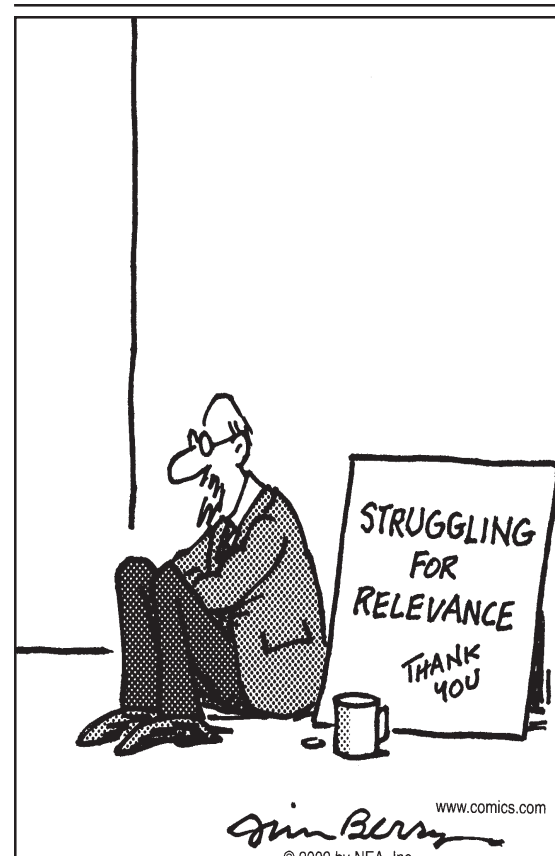
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