

# commentary

from other pens...

## U.S. expanding role in global conflicts

The United States is being drawn into attempts to broker peace among intractable foes. Deeply involved in the Mideast conflict, the Bush administration is now working a second front with India and Pakistan. President Bush came into office denouncing the kind of overseas entanglements he felt marred the presidency of his predecessor. But there are few regional conflicts that don't in some way affect U.S. interests. Furthermore, the Sept. 11 terror attacks made the world a lot smaller. "No country, no nation, has the luxury of remaining on the sidelines, because there are no sidelines," Secretary of State Colin Powell said. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage is visiting India and Pakistan this week; Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld goes there next to coax the nuclear-armed rivals away from the brink of war. Meanwhile, U.S. shuttle diplomacy continues in the Middle East. Assistant Secretary of State William Burns and CIA Director George Tenet are there now. Powell was there in April; Vice President Dick Cheney the month before.

Despite growing anti-American sentiment — seen in the Islamic world and in demonstrations in countries of democratic allies — many leaders look to U.S. involvement to help resolve their problems. The conflicts in the Middle East and on the subcontinent are getting the most attention.

The United States also is trying to end a prolonged, bloody civil war in Sudan and to re-establish dialogue between North and South Korea. The United States five years ago brokered a cease-fire to end 27 years of bloodshed in Northern Ireland. And Bush has promised a new "Marshall Plan" to help reconstruct post-Taliban Afghanistan, much as the United States helped rebuild Europe in the late 1940s under then-Secretary of State George Marshall.

"We're the dominant military, economic and political power on the globe. We're going to be drawn into mediation or conflict when these kind of major disputes arise," said Joseph Cirincione, an analyst with the Carnegie Institute for International Peace.

Bush made little mention of either the India-Pakistan or the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts in his State of the Union address. "In January it was very clear: Take care of al-Qaida and then go after Iraq," Cirincione said. "Well, they've forced themselves onto his agenda."

Both regional disputes threaten to undermine Bush's campaign against al-Qaida and Iraq.

Pakistan is the front-line ally in the battle against al-Qaida. Its movement of troops away from Afghanistan to its border with India adds tension to the standoff and complicates U.S. efforts in Afghanistan.

Similarly, Bush must help resolve the Palestinian-Israeli dispute if he ever wants to count on moderate Arab states to be allies — or at least not antagonists — in a wider campaign against Iraq.

American presidents have seen the Middle East as a trap and have tried to steer clear, including Clinton, recalled Lee Hamilton, an Indiana Democrat, former chairman of the House International Affairs Committee.

"But the fact of the matter is, an American president cannot stay away from the Middle East. He is just drawn into it," said Hamilton, who now directs the Woodrow Wilson International Center.

In the India-Pakistan standoff, the United States has been joined by other world leaders — including, notably, Russian President Vladimir Putin. "Everybody is involved, the entire international community is involved," said Powell. However, the secretary of state said differences between India and Pakistan over Kashmir remain deep-seated and resistant to outside mediation.

As Clinton before him, Bush is finding that U.S. involvement doesn't produce immediate results, said Michael O'Hanlon, a foreign policy analyst at Brookings Institution. "That is sort of par for the course when you're dealing with long-standing conflicts."

Bush has lately made "the right decisions," O'Hanlon said. "So it's better to let him correct himself than to make too much of his poor start."

**EDITOR'S NOTE** — *Tom Raum has reported on national and international affairs for The Associated Press since 1973.*

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## Planet Twinkie weighs on us

Some facts: About \$12 billion a year is spent on advertising targeted at children.

Children watching television during Saturday mornings view more than twice as many advertisements for unhealthy foods as adults see during programs aired after 9 p.m.

Nearly half of all the foods advertised during children's programming are cakes and candies. The average American child sees 10,000 food advertisements each year. Ninety-five percent are for fast-food, sugary cereals, soft drinks and candy.

The National Cancer Institute spends \$1 million per year on advertising the five-a-day program to encourage people to eat fruits and vegetables. That's \$1 million. In 1998, McDonald's alone spent just more than \$1 billion on advertising.

The entire government budget for nutrition education is one-fifth the annual advertising budget for Altoids mints.

Supermarkets alone sold \$10 billion in "children's" foods and drinks in 1998, and sales are expected to reach \$12 billion by 2003. The baker of Hostess products, Interstate Bakeries Corp., has a Web site called Planet Twinkie that features interactive games for children ages 7 to 11. On the site, children see a raccoon character familiar to them from Hostess television commercials. The raccoon, gliding on skis, attempts to eat as many Twinkies as it can.

Keebler's sends instant messages to children surfing the Internet.

There are educational books that use M&M's, Reese's Pieces and other candy to teach counting.



joan ryan

- commentary

Teletubbies, a wholesome show on PBS, engaged in toy promotions of McDonald's and Burger King.

Child psychologists regularly help consumer researchers ascertain what will attract children to a product. This research led recently, for example, to Cheetos producing its Mystery Colorz Snacks. The high-calorie snacks, neon-orange in color, turn a child's tongue blue or green.

Children directly influenced more than \$170 billion spent on food purchases in 2001.

The number of severely overweight children in the United States has doubled since 1980.

Between 1986 and 1998, obesity among African-American and Hispanic children increased by more than 120 percent; among white children, by about 50 percent. A third of children from lower-income households are obese.

Nationally, hospital costs related to childhood obesity have more than tripled in the past 20 years to \$127 million, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Overweight children are showing up in doctors' offices with adult health problems such as high cholesterol, high blood pressure and Type II diabetes. Some show early-warning signs of heart dis-

ease.

The U.S. surgeon general in January declared childhood obesity a national epidemic.

Those are the facts.

Here is the question.

Why don't we ban corporations from using the public airwaves to manipulate our children into craving products that, like tobacco, are harmful to their health?

The precedent is there: We banned tobacco advertising from television when smoking-related diseases became a public health crisis.

So First Amendment issues have been resolved. What else still stands in the way of banning junk-food advertisements during children's TV programming and on children's Web sites?

"It took 40 years to get where we are today with the fight against tobacco," Dr. Kelly Brownell, of Yale's Center for Eating and Weight Disorders, said during a Senate hearing on childhood obesity last week. "And the industry stalled, ignored the data, denied the data and did all the things that are well-known now. You can just see it coming with the food companies."

Sweden and Norway have already banned junk-food advertising to children. Great Britain is considering the same. In the United States, we can continue to let the food industry turn our children into junk-food junkies, or we can ground all flights to Planet Twinkie.

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## Men are speed demons



red green

- north of forty

Men generally like to do things fast. Drive, eat, change channels. It's a long list. My wife often says to me, "Slow down. It's not a race." I think she's wrong. I think it is a race — a race against time. We know we have to do things every day that we don't enjoy. We don't complain about that. Our only protest is to get those things over with as quickly as possible, to allow ourselves more time to do the things we want to do. Things that men enjoy, they do slowly. Like fishing or watching sports. Or thinking. There is one exception where men have something they enjoy though tend to do too quickly, but that's because they're trying to get the job done before their partner changes her mind. Generally the speed at which a man performs a task is inversely proportional to the pleasure he gets from the job. So the next time you're in a place of business and the clerk is taking forever, just stop and acknowledge that you're in the presence of someone who really enjoys his work.

### GETTING UP TO CODE

Whenever you build a structure or put an addition on your house or do any renovating, you have to deal with various professional codes. Maybe a building code to get a permit, or an electrical code, or a plumbing code. These are guidelines that must be met, in order for the job to be approved. These guidelines or codes are there to protect you and your neighbors from having to put up with a building that is either unsafe or unsightly. Codes are a good thing. Unfortunately, there are also codes for having a successful relationship. I call them Marriage Codes.

But where the building codes are public information, the Marriage Codes are Top Secret. You can look up how to properly install a toilet, but you are not allowed to look up what your partner considers a satisfactory birthday gift, or an acceptable comment on her new dress or hairstyle. Many of us are flying blind and are often blindsided. Now, I think Marriage Codes are a good thing. They make us better husbands and protect us from behaving like single people. My problem is the secrecy thing. Life has proven to me that when it comes to women, I'm not a good guesser. I need guidance in these areas. And the only people who can help me are other women. Other married women. But meeting privately with married women is apparently an infraction of one of the Marriage Codes. Hindsight is over-rated.

### NO RESPONSE REQUIRED

In grade 10 English class, I was introduced to the concept of the rhetorical question. The question that does not need, and does not want, an answer. I have since discovered that rhetorical questions are an important part of any marriage. If you're married, here are a few questions that you should not answer:



### berry's world

