

commentary

from our viewpoint...

Can we really win those idealistic wars?

Please, Mr. President, don't get us into wars we cannot actually win. It sounds very good to hear you say "We must win the War on Terrorism," but like many idealistic wars, this is one we cannot really win.

This is not the first such war the U.S. had fought, nor will it be the last. We seem to get into such a situation at least once in every 10-20 years. We always say "This one is different from the ones in the past, we know what our mistakes were and won't do that again."

About a century ago, the American public was beginning to fight such a war. The Women's Christian Temperance Union was attacking the bastions of rum and the demons of alcohol.

Their plan was simple: get everyone to take the "pledge" saying they would renounce all alcohol and spurn those who drank. With the women of the country also trying to gain equality, the battle seemed to spread like a modern wildfire as hundreds of thousands took the pledge and the saloons were attacked until many closed.

The battle plan went so far as to pass a constitutional amendment, the 18th, banning the manufacture or sale of alcohol in the country. This attempt to restrict the population created its own backlash which doomed the war, and gave rise to speakeasies and bootleggers.

In the long run, the government withdrew from the battlefield and repealed the 18th amendment with the 21st. They discovered this was a great way to raise money, and placed a "sin tax" on the sale of alcohol.

We found ourselves in another situation when we decided to defend the South Koreans from the invading North Koreans. The United Nations troops fought bravely and were able to retake the country and even push the north back to near the Chinese border.

Our commanders wanted to push on and to attack the Chinese, feeling we could defeat anyone. Suddenly we found ourselves facing a horde of troops as the Chinese entered the war on the side of the North Koreans. They overran our position and pushed us back to where we had started before a truce could be worked out to end the bloodshed.

That war continues as a shaky truce, and is proof of one old military adage there is no objective that cannot be taken as long as you are willing to sacrifice the number of troops it takes to overwhelm the opposition.

In the 1960s, President Johnson declared a "War on Poverty" through the legislation in his Great Society. While it did much to help blacks as they struggled to gain a place at the power table, it did little to actually reduce the number of people who were poor or on welfare.

In the '80s, we decided it was time for another war — this one on drugs — which was destroying our young people and many families. We did the same sorts of things we had done in our wars before, and while we could claim we had reduced the flow of drugs, we could not declare a victory. In fact, the drug war became elusive as the types and names of the drugs changed — it started with heroin and marijuana, but then we moved on to LSD, speed, uppers, downers and lots of cocaine.

Many of these drugs have been in the world much longer than the United States has been a country, but we had to try.

Now we face an enemy almost as elusive and faceless as drugs. The terrorist can come from anywhere, and strike with little or no warning.

These fanatics are willing to sacrifice everything — including their life — to reach their objective. This makes them hard to stop, and as the suicide bombings in Israel show, effective in killing innocent people.

We have declared war on the terrorist because of the of Sept. 11 attacks, which horrified us and gave us a focused sense of purpose. We have been chasing the shadows of terrorism around the globe for the past eight months.

We may not defeat terrorism because it feeds on an idea or belief, but we can be more specific about our goals in this struggle. We can use our intelligence to continue attacks against those who support the terrorists, and be determined in searching out their dens.

As we watch the efforts, we must be mindful of the fact we are sacrificing some of our freedoms in the name of protecting our country. Are we willing to make the ultimate sacrifice? And if we make that sacrifice, what kind of country will we have at the end? — Tom Betz



HABER BOSTON HERALD 2002

The young and the useless

I was driving by a high school in an unfamiliar part of town last week. It was late in the afternoon, the students were leaving, and I couldn't get over how young they all looked. They looked to me as if they were 11 or 12 years old and should be in grade 6 or 7 rather than in grade 9 or 10. Then I noticed that I was wrong — this was not a high school. It was a college. These 11-year-old kids were 20. That got me thinking about how many encounters I have where the person I'm dealing with is much younger than I expect them to be. The store clerk, the insurance salesman, the cop. It's as if they took everybody out of elementary school and gave them jobs while I wasn't looking. Of course, that's not right. These people are the exact age they should be for what they're doing. The problem is mine. I've forgotten what young people look like. That's because all of my instrumentation needs to be re-calibrated, since I spend so much of my time with myself and other people my age. It's hard enough to face the fact that you're no longer young. It's a shocker when you realize that the people 20 years younger than you aren't young either. There are only two places in the world where a man like me can still feel young — in his own mind and Florida.

THE CODE

There's a movie out now about the secret codes that the military uses to prevent the enemy from intercepting their messages. This is not an unusual



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concept. Husbands and wives have been communicating in code since the beginning of time. When an attractive woman moves in next door, your wife will say "Have you seen our new neighbor?" but she really means "I've seen our new neighbor, and I'll be watching you like a hawk." When your wife says "Does this dress look all right to wear to the party?" she's really saying, "I'd like you to start paying attention to me now, in the hopes that the pattern will carry over to the party so that our friends will see that although their marriages have become stale and repetitive, ours is still fresh and vibrant." And although you're thinking, "Wear any dress you want. You don't need me to tell you what to wear. And vice versa," what you say is, "Yeah, it's great. What should I wear?" And after you've been at the party for a couple of hours and your wife says, "I think we should go home now," you're thinking, "This is looking good," but what she really means is, "I think we should go home now." And when you get home and she says, "It's time for bed," what she really means is "Goodnight."

LOSS OF FRAGILITY

People of Taipei proud of democratic progress

TAIPEI — We are met at the airport by two protocol officers from the Government Information Office and escorted through customs without so much as a glance from the inspectors.

For four days, we will be honored guests of the Republic of China, newly democratic, greatly prosperous, still smarting from its place on the short end of the "One China" policy.

We are booked into the Grand Hotel, a sumptuous Chinese-style hostelry on a hill at the south end of downtown, overlooking all 2.7 million residents of this city.

And what a city, a bustling Ozzie-and-Harriet sort of place, where the boulevards are lined with tropical trees, the women wear skirts and pale hose and the world's brands are on display at every turn.

It is a city that prides in its capitalist accomplishment, home to a broad middle class and a new democracy. People live in apartments, in bright new buildings and in rooms that rise 10 or more stories over each small business place. There is no space for suburban houses. Many drive cars, ride buses or the Metro, but even more ride the ubiquitous motor scooters. Cabs, all yellow, abound.

As guests of the government, we (there are 33 American publishers, wives and friends representing the National Newspaper Association) are expected to attend briefing after briefing — the ministries of agriculture, mainland affairs, information, on down the line. As the week progresses, we work our way up to dinner with the vice-minister of information, and finally to the executive office.

At each level of the government food chain, the talk becomes more strident. The Republic of China, or Taiwan, is a nation yearning for respect, but finding little.

The government descends from the first Chinese revolution, the one led in 1911-12 by Dr. Sun Yat-sen, an American-trained physician who dreamed of bringing democracy to his homeland.

His Kuomintang army, led by the great Gen. Chiang Kai-shek, fought first the government, then the warlords, the Japanese, then finally the Communists. It was banished to this island, known to the west as Formosa (Portuguese for "beautiful green island"), in the Red revolution of 1949.

Chaing said he would establish democracy after the Japanese were ousted, but the first Legislative Yuan elected on the mainland sat for 48 years, waiting for new elections for all of One China. Democracy did not come until a decade ago, and until the current administration, the nation has been ruled by the Kuomintang, or KMT, sometimes not gently. Even today, signs proclaim the death penalty for drug dealers and petty criminals get relatively harsh sentences. But there is little crime, almost no violence. Taiwan is safe and friendly.

The United States continued to back the Nation-



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alists through the 1950s and '60s, until Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon went to China in 1972. Under Jimmy Carter in 1979, the U.S. ever so politely switched diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Peking (the spelling was changed Beijing later).

Instead of an American embassy today, there is something called the American Institute in Taiwan. Its officers do the same jobs as their counterparts around the world, get the same pay, but they have "retired" from government service. Until their next assignment. Even the CIA spooks, apparently, are on the private payroll.

The tawdry appearance and crowded condition of the former embassy give the lie to any thought that this is separate but equal treatment. The Taiwanese knows this, but if they are angry at America, they restrain themselves. They are eternally grateful for the support we have given them, before and after the "de recognition." They know they owe their continued independence mostly to American diplomacy — and to American cruisers off their shore.

But the lack of respect hurts. Wherever we go, we hear about the way Taiwan is treated by the world. No nation in Europe recognizes it as the government of One China, save the Vatican. In the Americas, only the small republics and islands around the Caribbean have embassies here.

Business is another matter. Mainland China has become Taiwan's largest trading partner, and Tai-

wan businesses have invested as much as \$70 billion on the mainland. More than 400,000 Taiwanese live and work there. But all trade and all money must move through Hong Kong or another "neutral" point. There are no direct flights, no telephone circuits, no shipping lanes.

Cross-strait affairs, as they are called, were discussed by "non-government" entities through the 1990s, but China broke them off when newly democratic Taiwan started to make noises about being an independent, sovereign state. They have not resumed, and mainland China makes it clear that the talks will not resume outside the framework of One China. Officially, at least, the government here does not disagree.

Prosperous, happy, increasingly free, intensely capitalistic, highly educated, friendly and deeply influential in mainland business, the ROC lacks only one thing, and that thing it cannot buy.

Quote of the Day: "If you look like your passport picture, you probably need the trip." — Red Green
Red Green is the star of "The Red Green Show," a television series seen in the United States on PBS and in Canada on the CBC Network, and the author of the new book "Duct Tape is not Enough: A humorous guide to midlife" (Hatherleigh Press, 2002). Watch for the feature film Red Green's "Duct Tape Forever" at a theater near you.

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"I'll have a glass of champagne and the corporate scandal sandwich."