

commentary

from other pens...

U.S. has mixed record of changing leaders

If it's any consolation to Yasser Arafat, he has a lot of company. The United States has a long history of trying to get rid of foreign leaders who don't measure up.

Some methods are more decorous than others. President Bush made known his desire that Arafat be removed in a nationally televised address.

Over the years, U.S. efforts at regime change have been less gentlemanly. In this category are outright assassination, invasions, covert plots.

"Peace requires a new and different Palestinian leadership," Bush said Monday, his measured tones masking one of the most significant developments in America's long and sometimes tortured involvement in the Middle East.

Sometimes the U.S., in its search for new leadership abroad, has the luxury of broad support, as in the air and land campaign that led to the ouster of the ruling Taliban militia in Afghanistan last November.

Much of the world showed understanding for Bush's decision to use force against a government the United States said was complicit in the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Bush also wants somebody other than Saddam Hussein running Iraq, and force is a strong possibility. If he chooses that option, however, international backing is likely to be scant.

The Europeans, so often with the United States during times of crisis, generally believe military action against Iraq would not have a legal basis. Most also firmly rejected Bush's demand that Arafat be removed as a condition for peace.

Latin America and the Caribbean have been favored hunting grounds for American presidents eager for regime change.

One example is Cuba, where a Senate committee found in 1975 there had been eight CIA-sponsored attempts on the life of President Fidel Castro. (Castro says there were many more.) A generation later, Castro is still around. The official policy nowadays is to apply pressure to nudge Castro into promoting democracy and free market changes.

The Bush administration is not fussy about who dismantles the totalitarian structure Castro has erected. If Castro himself does it, so be it.

Castro was also the protagonist of America's most embarrassing regime change initiative. He easily disposed of a U.S.-trained Cuban exile force at the Bay of Pigs in 1961.

President Clinton sent troops to Haiti in 1994 to oust a military clique that had seized power from an elected president three years earlier. Internationally, the invasion drew few protests, having received the blessing of the U.N. Security Council beforehand.

The first Bush administration sent troops to Panama in 1989 to evict and arrest Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega, an anti-democrat who was wanted in the United States on drug trafficking charges.

Although much of Latin America felt the unilateral U.S. action was unwarranted, U.S. officials can respond that with Noriega gone, Panama has enjoyed 12 years of democratic stability.

Reagan's administration sponsored a Nicaraguan rebel force to fight pro-Cuban Sandinista Daniel Ortega. Eventually, it was Nicaragua's voters who took care of that regime change, electing a moderate in 1990.

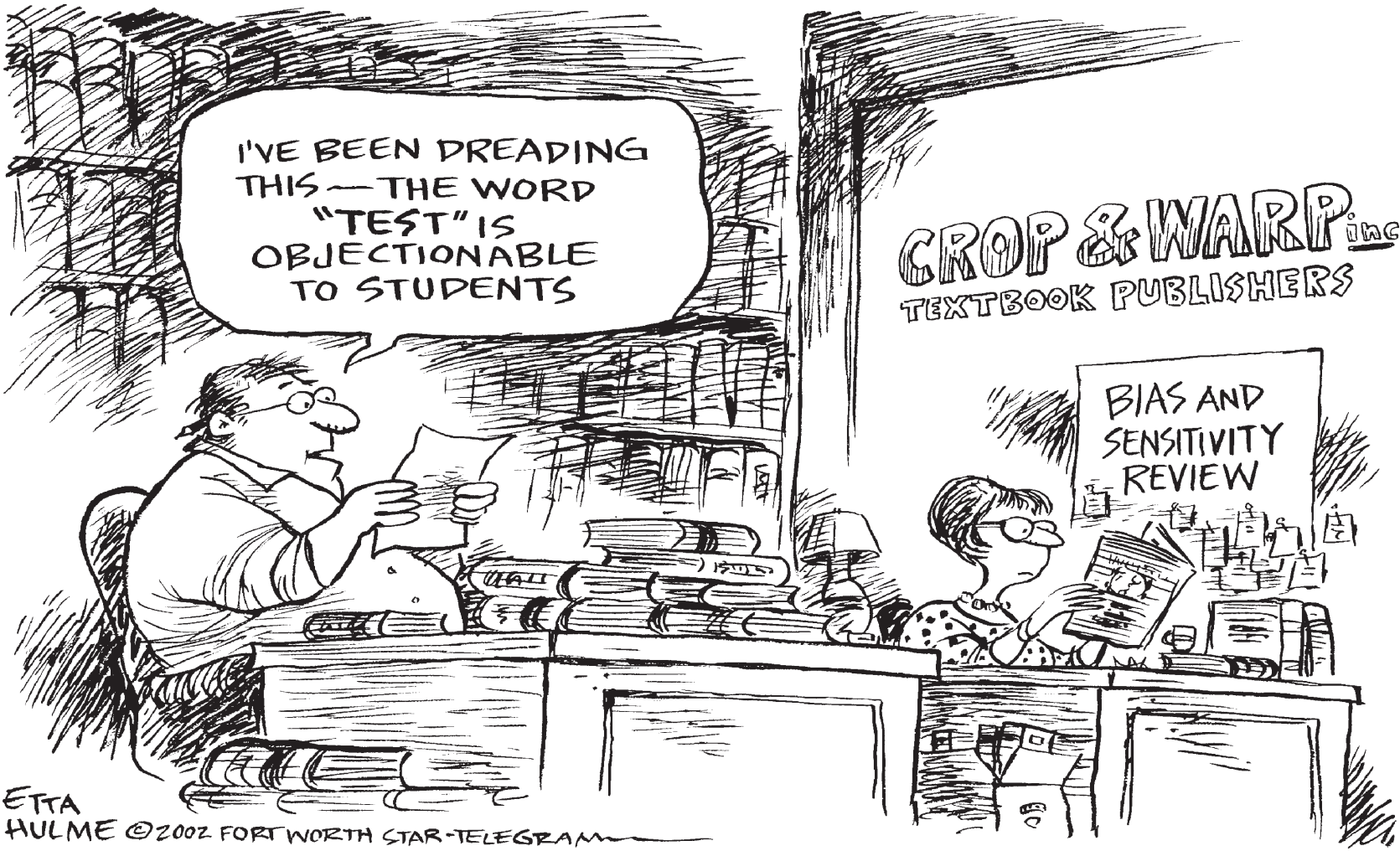
U.S. troops deposed a leftist government in Grenada in 1983. American jets attacked Libya three years later, appearing to target the compound of longtime leader and American bugaboo Moammar Gadhafi at one point. He survived but now seems somewhat tamer than he once did.

Old timers remember two early U.S. regime-change successes: Iran in 1953 and Guatemala in 1954, both orchestrated by the CIA. Both resulted in the emergence of regimes friendly to the United States but with limited backing at home, partly because of poor human rights records.

In Iran, the outcome was a major setback for Washington. An anti-American Islamic radical regime was installed in 1979 and remains.

Bush has branded Iran an "axis of evil" country but has not demanded new leadership there. He is counting on the Iranian people.

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



China has many things to learn before 2008

Observations from mainland China:

Beijing is the last stop on our three-China trip. We've already been to Taiwan and Hong Kong. Both were eager to show us how free they are.

We're a bit nervous about going onto the mainland. Our guide and mentor, Allen Beerman of Nebraska, had to return home after his wife broke her arm in Taiwan.

This is it guys — the really big, Communist China, the home of 1.3 billion people, the land of Mao.

- The People's Republic of China is fighting and clawing its way into the present. It is tearing down slums and building modern high-rise apartments as fast as it can. It is looking forward eagerly to the 2008 Olympic games, which will be held in Beijing.
- While they eagerly embrace visitors after decades of isolationism, the folks in the People's Republic still have a lot to learn about tourism.
- Our meals were prepaid, and instead of being told that it would cost \$8 yuan for an extra water, beer or Coke, we were told that we could have ONE drink with our food.



cynthia haynes

• open season

- Ice isn't available. It took two hours and two calls to get some at the hotel. Bottled water is available on the bus but it is not chilled. We were dehydrated the whole trip.
- Public bathrooms are truly third world. In the tourist-trap jade factory, the women's stalls feature a hole in the concrete. You squat and pray you can get back up again without falling.
- At the jade factory, we are told that we WILL watch a 10-minute lecture on jade instead of being invited to watch the wonderfully knowledgeable lady tell us how to tell real jade from fake.
- Capitalism has come to China in a big way. There are vendors and hucksters everywhere.
- They are everywhere around the Forbidden City and the Great Wall. In Tianan'men Square, they

followed us the dozen blocks we had to walk back to the tour bus and I thought a couple were going to hop on and join us for supper.

- You bargain everywhere. As I was leaving, I wanted to buy a stuffed panda in the hotel gift shop but I didn't have enough money. After admiring the toy, I regretfully put it back until the clerk asked me how much I would pay. I told her what I had and after a few minutes, while she determined that she could get no more out of me, I triumphantly carried off the plush animal.
- It was interesting to find out that Coke and GM each contributed large sums towards the Chinese efforts to get the 2008 Olympic games. These two merchandising giants see China as an almost limitless market.
- The Chinese are friendly people trying to catch up with the rest of the world. They still need a few lessons on selling themselves, but they're getting there.
- Money from the Olympics should help them upgrade their infrastructure.
- By 2008, they say they'll be ready to host the world. I hope so.

Politics blocks seniors from getting help

The 2002 Medicare wars resumed this week, delayed a month as hospitals successfully fought cuts proposed by Ways and Means Chairman Bill Thomas (R-Calif.).

The prospects this year are that Congress will end up helping hospitals, doctors, HMOs, rural health centers and other providers — who do need assistance — but not senior citizens, who need it more.

Somehow, Congress has been able to come to agreement this election year on billions in aid for farmers — mostly corporate farmers — but can't do it for seniors.

Farmers were the beneficiaries of a bidding war/spending frenzy. The dynamic on a Medicare prescription-drug benefit this year looks to be partisan stalemate followed by political blame-casting.

With luck, Congress will decide this fall that it has to do something on the Medicare front and will approve funds to raise inadequate reimbursements to providers.

That may slow the trend of doctors and HMOs dropping Medicare patients and will help financially strapped urban, teaching and rural hospitals. But it won't aid seniors facing surging pharmaceutical costs.

The House was scheduled to vote last month on a Medicare plan written by Thomas, but its action was postponed because industry lobbyists and backbench Republicans complained to GOP leaders about reimbursement cuts he intended to impose on hospitals.



morton kondracke

• commentary

introduced his new measure than partisan wrangling began.

Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) denounced it as "meager and inadequate" at the National Press Club and declared that "the only thing worse than not passing Medicare prescription-drug reform would be to pass a phony program that undermines the coverage that already exists."

Of course, something better than passing no benefit — given the indispensable place that drugs have in modern medicine and in the lives of seniors — would be for Democrats and Republicans to make a deal to provide one.

The Congressional Budget Office judges that the House GOP drug plan is likely to gain participation by 90 percent of seniors.

Enriching the measure to cover 95 percent or 97 percent would seem to be within the capacity of legislators determined to address a serious national need.

Or, alternatively, Congress could at least agree to provide coverage protecting seniors — or perhaps only low-income seniors — against catastrophic drug expenses.

But the two parties are putting ideology and election-year politics first. Republicans insist on reforming Medicare to give seniors a choice of insurance plans. Democrats charge this will "force"

them into HMOs.

Democrats also oppose anything that smacks of means-testing Medicare, which they consider a social insurance program like Social Security with guaranteed benefits regardless of income.

Democrats also want a much richer benefit — \$800 billion under a House bill and \$450 billion to \$500 billion under a bill sponsored by Kennedy along with Sens. Bob Graham (Fla.) and Zell Miller (Ga.).

But, most of all, Democrats don't want to give President Bush the opportunity to hold a signing ceremony in the Rose Garden.

Even some House GOP leaders acknowledge that their bill is "mainly politics" — providing Republicans with cover as Democrats try to exploit the drug issue to win support from seniors.

It's also designed as part of the larger GOP strategy of piling up a list of House achievements that the Senate is unable to match.

And, indeed, it's unlikely that the Senate will pass any drug bill. Majority Leader Thomas Daschle (D-S.D.) intends to bring up the Graham-Miller bill for debate — possibly next week — but it's given no chance of passing.

So, there's likely to be an impasse. The question is: When will it ever break? This election is not likely to give either party decisive control of Congress, so a compromise of differences is the only way that any drug benefit can be passed. But both sides seem determined to use the issue politically, not solve it. It's no credit to either of them.

Morton Kondracke is executive editor of Roll Call, the newspaper of Capitol Hill.

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