

commentary

from other pens...

Asia security concerns never seem to go away

Between 1941 and 1975, the United States went from war to war in Asia — first Japan, then Korea, then Vietnam. One win, one tie and one loss.

Afghanistan aside, the hot wars have stopped but the risks of conflict on the continent, particularly the Eastern and Northeast region, have been relatively constant to this day.

Nerves were rattled at the State Department and the Pentagon last Saturday when vessels from the two Koreas had a shootout in South Korean territorial waters.

The reason for the angst was that such confrontations on the peninsula can escalate — and lead quickly to the involvement of American forces. The conflict between China and Taiwan poses similar risks. Both struggles are more than 50 years old.

Bates Gill, an Asia specialist at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, says it's hard to overestimate the dangers in those regions.

"The potential for pretty serious security challenges to become more challenging is always out there," he says.

In much of Asia, efforts to achieve neighborly relations are thwarted by historical grudges, ideological clashes, religious strife, weapons of mass destruction and uncertainty about whether a China will be a force for peace.

U.S. administrations often expend energies elsewhere when a serious outbreak of violence threatens. Each time India and Pakistan engage in threats and counter-threats, U.S. diplomats swing into action, as they did this past spring.

But the possibility of direct American military involvement resulting from a nuclear exchange between the two is highly unlikely.

On the Korean Peninsula, not much has changed since the Armistice was signed almost 50 years ago.

Saturday's confrontation between the vessels of the two Koreas helped derail an administration effort to resume negotiations with North Korea on nonproliferation and other issues that were expected to start next week.

Expressing outrage over the Saturday incident, South Korean President Kim Dae-jung warned of potentially dire consequences for the North. "We have the capacity," he said.

North Korea is no slouch itself. Its chemical and biological weapons capabilities threaten the 37,000 U.S. forces in South Korea and the country's civilian population centers.

Gill ranks the conflict between China and Taiwan even more perilous than the one between the two Koreas.

"Two great powers could come into conflict," he says, alluding to China and the United States.

President Bush said last year he was prepared to do "whatever it took to help Taiwan defend herself."

Administration officials are debating how the China-Taiwan power balance is affected by China's testing of new advanced air-to-air missiles last week. To counter this Chinese upgrade, help for Taiwan may be on the way, officials say.

Taiwan aside, there is no consensus here as to how China, once it achieves its full economic and military potential, will relate to its neighbors.

"China's future is very much to be shaped," says Paul Wolfowitz, second in command at the Pentagon. China, he says, could become a force for peace or a "threatening power."

U.S. security concerns, of course, are not limited to East Asia. Iraq has the means and the motives to inflict grave damage on the United States. And so do terrorists from al-Qaida and other groups. The American military effort in Afghanistan is approaching the nine-month mark.

Unlike some conflicts, the China-Taiwan and Korean Peninsula struggles seem never to go away.

"These are long term and intractable challenges," says Gill. "I don't think they will erupt into conflict any time soon. They will still pose an intensive security dilemma. They will require lots of care and feeding."

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



The ABCs of Eminem

If you want to understand America, it has been said, you need to understand baseball. Here's a lesser-known corollary: If you want to understand American teenagers, you need to understand pop music.

So I am studying the phenomenon of Eminem. The rapper's most recent album reached No. 1 on the Billboard 200 chart within hours of hitting the stores.

Coinciding with the album's release, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The New York Times*, *The Chronicle* and every other mainstream media outlet have prominently featured the 28-year-old star, whose two previous albums of largely misogynistic, violent and homophobic lyrics have sold 30 million copies.

One reviewer called him "one of the most important artists in contemporary music." Another characterized him as "the most compelling music icon of his generation." Yet another, perhaps a tiny bit swept up in the buzz, wrote, "Ignore him at your peril."

I have regarded Eminem in much the way I do the face-distorting sour candy called Warheads my son and his friends consume. I don't understand the attraction, given the horrid taste, but there it is.

I am not interested in figuring out if Eminem is good or bad as a vocalist, or good or bad as a social commentator. I only want to know why kids like him. Does the music appeal to them because they are simmering with the same virulent anger



joan ryan

• commentary

and violence as he is?

I posed the question to an expert on the relationship between teens and music. He has heard the question many times before over several decades.

"Parents get upset because they don't remember their own rebellions through music," says Donald Roberts, the Stanford communications professor who is co-author of the 1998 book, "It's Not Only Rock and Roll: Popular Music in the Lives of Adolescents."

"Music is central to adolescent identity. And adolescence is about making sure adults know, 'We're not like you.' Pop music is a safe and comfortable way to be out on the edge and be different."

I'd like to say that teens in the '70s listened to Alice Cooper and Kiss because we thought they were brilliant musical artists. Mostly, though, it was for the looks of disgust and fear on our parents' faces. We made sure they understood that Ozzy Osbourne bit the head off a real bat that spurted real blood.

For my parents, who came of age with the Plat-

ters and Chubby Checker, not to mention actual bobby socks, reacting to their children's musical tastes required great restraint, mostly in not beating us to death for turning into the profound deviants we unmistakably were despite years of catechism and Sunday roasts.

Every generation's teenagers gravitate to the kind of music that reflects the very sins their parents have spent their lives lecturing against. Eminem is tailor-made for the children of socially sensitive, diversity-embracing, politically correct parents. What could be more appalling to this generation of parents than hearing their teenagers use racial slurs and hate-filled slang in singing along with their favorite CD?

And what could be more satisfying to the teens? This doesn't mean parents ought to accept the abhorrent lyrics with an understanding shrug any more than our parents accepted ours.

"A mother can say, 'Look, I'm female. Your sister is female. He's talking about us when he says those hateful things about women,'" Roberts says. "Your child will say it's just a song, and they'll continue to listen. But they'll never hear it exactly the same again."

If Eminem's popularity sheds any light on today's teenagers it is this: They are more like us than they ever want to know.

Joan Ryan is a columnist for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Send comments to her e-mail at joanryan@sfgchronicle.com.

Wearing the double standard

I've been observing how married couples dress after they pass the 10-year mark, and there seems to be a pattern. As always, there are exceptions, but generally the husbands tend to dress far more casually than the wives do. And even for the husbands who dress well, it's usually because their wives dress them. I'm sure you've seen middle-aged couples in the mall where she's dressed up in a smart outfit with a matching purse, and he's wearing torn jeans and a sweat shirt, both of which fitted him several years and hundreds of Big Macs ago. The reason for this vast discrepancy in the way married men and women dress is because men choose clothes based on how they make them feel, whereas women choose clothes based on how they make them look. Men are generally less concerned about their appearance and married men even less so. Whenever you see a dress code at a function or a club, trust me, they're talking to the married men. Single men are still making a sales presentation. Married men have closed the deal and are just looking to honor the contract without losing all of their dignity. So my advice to the wives out there is to give up on getting your husband to change his clothes because he doesn't look good. Instead you have to make the clothes he's wearing now make him feel bad. I suggest a digital camera or a full-length mirror.

NO TIME FOR SAFETY

When you're newly married and have young children in the home, you really appreciate all of the safety precautions in products and appliances: the childproof bottle tops, the extra layers of packaging, the safety lock on the butane lighter. But



red green

• north of forty

once you hit middle age and the kids are gone, your priorities change. Safety has decreased in value. Time is the real asset. When you've got a headache, you want that bottle to open quickly, not safely. When you want to light the barbecue or a candle, you don't want to have to use both hands; that would mean putting down the TV remote. Whenever you make things safe, you automatically make them more complicated. We don't want or need that anymore. We'd rather have things simple and dangerous. Insisting that life needs to be complicated and safe is the reason half of us are asleep by 9 o'clock every night.

TIMES WHEN A MIDDLE-AGED MAN SHOULD SAY "NO"

- When the boss asks him to speak his mind.
- When a strange woman asks him for anything.
- When he's alone at the Boat Show.
- When the waitress starts looking pretty.
- When the cops asks if he knows anything.
- When his wife asks, "Do you have a problem?"

WASTE NOT WAIST SHOT

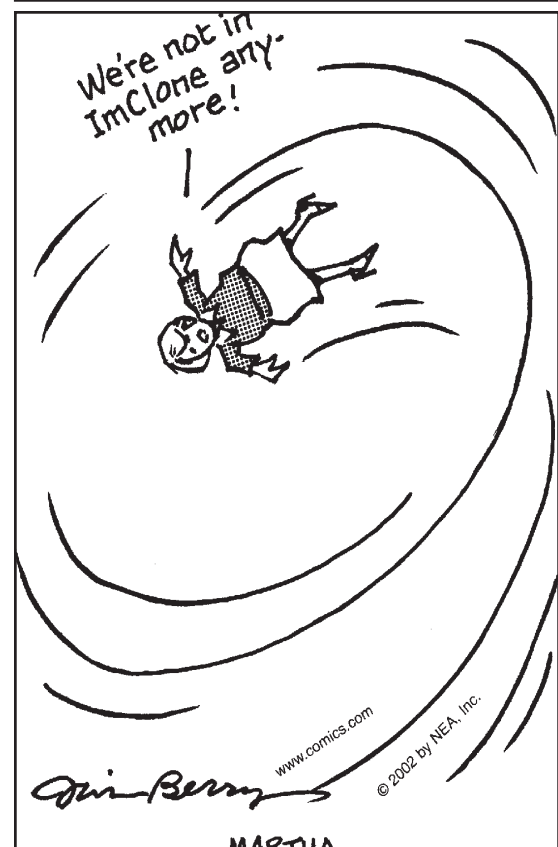
My wife is fanatical about food going bad. If a salad sits out on the counter for too long or if meat spends a few days in the refrigerator or if the milk looks at her the wrong way, they're gone. She starts every day by reading the "best before" labels on

everything in the kitchen. And if it's expired, or even if today's the day, it's outa there. Now as a normal man, a hunter, nothing upsets me more than to see perfectly good food thrown away — food that I could have eaten sooner but was holding back out of a fear of gluttony and its after-effects. And there are thousands of men out there just like me. On Garbage Day Eve, try driving through a suburb at three in the morning and notice all the kitchen lights on. If you could peek in the windows you'd see men like me, with a chair pulled up to the open fridge door as they pick their way through death row, getting one last mouthful of pleasure before the offenders are sent to the end of the driveway by the grim reaper who sleeps in righteous serenity just a few steps away.

Quote of the Day: "Whatever hits the fan will not be evenly distributed." — 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 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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