

commentary

from other pens...

U.S.-China together on North Korea issue

Differences often dominate U.S.-Chinese summits, but Friday's meeting between President Bush and Chinese President Jiang Zemin is expected to be a sober exchange on their shared concerns about a nuclear-armed North Korea.

Both governments say they don't want to see North Korea in the nuclear camp. The big question is whether the two countries can agree on a joint strategy to minimize the threat both believe is posed by the North's newly disclosed weapons program.

Trade, Taiwan, Iraq and human rights all will be on the agenda at Bush's Texas ranch, but North Korea will transcend all other issues.

The two leaders will meet ahead of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation conference this weekend in Los Cabos, Mexico.

U.S. officials say China does not want another declared nuclear power on its border, and both the U.S. and China believe the North Korean nuclear program, left unchecked, could trigger an arms race in the region.

China was more oblique than the United States in its criticism, asserting last week that it did not support any country that develops weapons of mass destruction.

Jiang, 72, probably will be meeting with Bush for the last time as China's leader since he is expected to make a gradual exit from power. But the Bush administration is not treating him as a lame duck.

China often is billed as North Korea's closest ally, but Beijing has on occasion been at odds with its reclusive neighbor.

After China joined the nuclear club in 1964, North Korean leader Kim Il-sung asked for China's help in developing a nuclear weapons of its own. Chinese leader Mao Zedong said no.

Don Oberdorfer, an Asia expert at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, said China rebuffed North Korea again in 1994 when Pyongyang was suspected of traveling down the nuclear weapons path. China told North Korea it would not veto proposed sanctions against Pyongyang that were being considered by the U.N. Security Council, Oberdorfer said.

At Friday's meeting in Crawford, Texas, Bush will wonder how far Jiang will be willing to go in pressuring North Korea to reverse course on its nuclear weapons program.

Jiang will be curious about whether Bush has regime change in mind for North Korea, much as he does for Iraq. Oberdorfer says there is a point beyond which China will not support U.S. policy in North Korea.

"If the Bush administration's goal is regime change, the Chinese would be very much opposed to that," he said. "Getting rid of weapons is one thing. Getting rid of regimes is another."

One difference between Iraq and North Korea is that the latter is much more dependent on outsiders than Iraq.

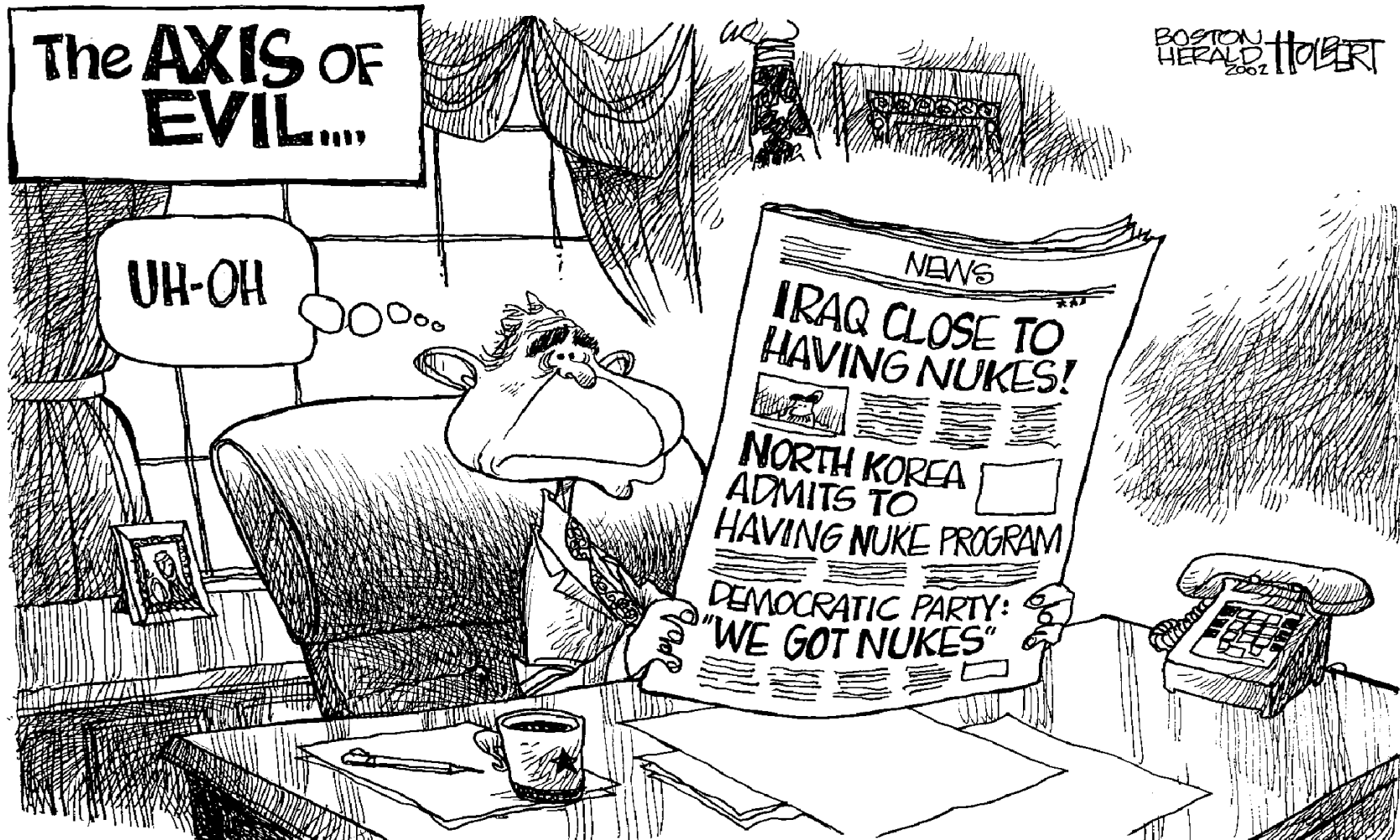
The United States, Japan and South Korea "should end all food and fuel aid to North Korea immediately" and encourage Russia and China to do the same until North Korea takes steps to eliminate its nuclear weapons programs, say Heritage researchers Balbina Y. Hwang, Larry M. Wortzel and Baker Spring.

The Bush administration has said it will not allow political considerations to influence food donations because such gifts help needy North Koreans. U.S.-Chinese relations have been on the upswing, and China has made several friendly gestures toward Washington lately to ensure a friendly visit. Hoping to deflect criticism of its policy toward Tibet, China has released a Tibetan nun from prison and received a representative of Tibet's exiled Buddhist leader, the Dalai Lama.

It also has taken several steps over the past two months to ease U.S. concerns about China's proliferation activities on both the nuclear and biological weapons fronts.

Taiwan remains a sore point in the relationship. China continues to make clear its opposition to U.S. arms sales to Taiwan. The Bush administration has criticized Chinese missile deployments across from Taiwan.

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



In these anxious times, give me games

Legendary New York sports columnist Red Smith liked to tell the story of Laurence Stallings, a novelist and playwright who had been a correspondent in World War I.

In 1925, Stallings was sent by Hearst newspapers to cover a football game between Illinois and the University of Pennsylvania. A fellow named Red Grange, who would become one of the greatest halfbacks of all time, ran for three touchdowns in his first East Coast appearance. When the game ended and the sportswriters were pounding the keys of their typewriters, Stallings paced the press box and clutched his hair. "I can't write it!" wailed the man who had covered a war. "It's too big!"

Smith would share the anecdote when it was suggested that writing about sports was not a very meaningful use of his talent. He never put up a particularly vigorous defense of himself, recognizing that he wasn't shaping national policy or saving lives. But he would point out that anything that can move people as deeply and wildly as sports seemed worth chronicling.

This is why, to answer the growing chorus of critics, the San Francisco Giants are taking up space on the front page these days alongside news about war in Iraq and the crashing economy. It is why, despite more important events unfolding around the world, the Giants and other cherished sports teams still matter.



joan ryan

• commentary

Civilization will not be altered whether the Giants or Angels win the World Series. But in these anxious times, the games — with their momentary heroes and heart-pounding plots — stir in us an unreasonable euphoria that I consider a kind of grace: We don't have to earn it, save for it or deserve it. We just have to care.

And if you care, even a little, you can't help but be uplifted at the sight of men jumping in unison like children, their arms around each other, in utter disbelief and delight in their unlikely victory. You can't help but take pure pleasure in reading the next day of what the boys did on the field.

"Baseball is legitimate news right now," says Rob Elias, University of San Francisco professor of politics and editor of the anthology, "Baseball and the American Dream" (M.E. Sharpe, 2001).

"In an increasingly mobile, isolated and fragmented society, baseball has the capacity to generate a sense of community. It offers one of the few real opportunities for public interaction. ... I think

the Giants should be covered more by the media, not less."

The argument can be made that sports is never more important than in times of crisis. After Sept. 11, football and baseball stadiums became the only venues in which large numbers of people could gather, feel connected and express their shared patriotism.

This has long been so. The national anthem had been played at sporting events since the turn of the century but only for special events, such as Opening Day or the World Series. With the outbreak of World War II, the anthem became a fixture at every game.

I am biased, of course, in putting forth this defense of baseball, having become a starry-eyed Giants fan when I stopped covering them as a journalist and began watching as a spectator. I rediscovered why all sports fans believe in miracles. Unlike just about everything else in life, games offer almost endless opportunities for a better outcome from previous attempts, an opportunity to close the door on yesterday and start over.

So give me the news about the looming war and the diving Dow. But also give me the games. Give me some hope, no matter how indefensible, that this time our side will come through.

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

Hoof in mouth disease

There's a sign in our town's only Laundromat, "No Horse Blankets in the Washing Machines, Please." Good advice at home, too, I would think. But there's a difference between people who own horses and everyone else.

I was talking to a friend one day about a neighbor who owns a horse. "He talks about that horse all the time," he said. "What it eats, what it does in the morning, how it follows him around, how it loves the rain."

"What's so unusual about that?" I asked. "Do you know what his wife eats? Do you know what she does in the morning? Do you know if she likes pina colodas and getting caught in the rain?" It took me quite some time to even dredge up the wife's name. I don't believe my horse-loving neighbor has ever mentioned her.

But we all knew the horse's name. And that's the difference between people who own horses and horse people.

Horse people are not able to talk about anything but horses. You say "Hello" to a person who owns horses and they'll say something like, "Hello, nice weather we're having," back to you. Say "Hello" to a horse person and they'll say, "That reminds me of something Mr. Ed did this morning. He's just like a human. Did I mention we spent \$1200 on the



jim mullen

• the village idiot

vet yesterday? Whew, and to think we nearly wasted that money putting it in the kid's college fund. We were going to get Muffy braces but I told her most boys like a good overbite."

You could say to a horse person, "I went to the dentist this morning and he told me I was going to need four root canals done on the same day without anesthesia," and they would say, "That reminds me, Mr. Ed needs to be brushed. Want to come watch? Did we tell you that he's getting plastic surgery? He's so sensitive about the way he looks. He thinks his nose is too big."

"Is he easy to ride?" you might ask. "Ride? Oh, that's rich. No one rides Mr. Ed, he's a show horse. He might get scratched or nicked. We just walk him around the ring a few times for the judges. Here, help me get him in the shower. He likes to take a nice, long hot shower before he gets his pedicure." The shower is a walk-in ar-

angement with nine heads and heated to the perfect temperature. At night they put heat lamps on him so he won't grow an ugly winter coat.

I know what you're thinking, I've laid it on a little thick about horse people. Think so? Sue and I once visited a fanciful castle in Europe. We took a train to a tiny, quaint town, then walked toward the huge chateau about a half-mile away. The place was massive, a four-story stone pile, a slate roof with fairy tail turrets sitting in the middle of several square miles of wooded park. An impressive weekend home if there ever was one. We walked around it twice but couldn't find the main entrance. Or any open entrance, just massive closed doors at the end of sweeping cobble stone ramps. And a remarkable lack of tourists. Finally we spotted a lone stroller and asked him how to get in.

"This isn't the chateau," he said, "These are the stables. The chateau is over that hill." He shook his head and said, "How do you say in English? Ah, yes, horse people."

Jim Mullen is the author of "It Takes A Village Idiot: A Memoir of Life After the City" (Simon and Schuster, 2001). He also contributes regularly to Entertainment Weekly, where he can be reached at jim_mullen@ew.com

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