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# WEEKEND BREAK

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## Global politics, junior high-style

What if world nations governed in the spirit of certain recent exchanges?

By GAIL HENRIKSON  
*The Daily Astorian*

A few weeks ago, headlines across the nation stated that the North Korean president had declared the U.S. president a “mentally deranged ... dotard.”

When I first saw this headline in the Washington Post, I immediately broke into laughter. My guffaw was triggered not by any comedy inherent in the escalating threats and the implicit diplomatic ramifications. Instead, I had been caught unaware and was able to recognize the absolute ludicrousness of the situation.

My immediate thought was a trip back in time to my days in junior high school. Perhaps student life is different today, but I remember those days as a time of great insecurity. We often lived in pre-adolescent angst over the unpredictable pranks played by the boys in the class or by the linguistic cruelty of the girls. (Not to stereotype, but those were the gender distinctions in my educational paradigm.)

From the perspective of time, it's easy to see that this childish meanness was based on a need to assert one's independence and prove one's strength. And, in hindsight, the level of immaturity we used to assert our maturity was laughable.

This led me to wonder what the world would be like if we conducted more aspects of our governance as if we were 12-year-olds trying to prove how sophisticated we are.

Rogue nations? No longer a problem. Anyone who has ever been ostracized in the lunchroom will understand the power of conformity. After a week of being shunned by diplomats in the United Nations cafeteria, ambassadors from unruly nations would be scampering back to their homes, begging their leaders to assimilate to international societal norms and negotiate treaties. Imagine the shame of hundreds of world leaders taunting an ambassador: “Nah, nah. You don't have any friends.” Surely world peace cannot be far behind.

Military actions, likewise, would take on a new norm. Gone would be the militarized and deadly weaponry that threatens the world today. “Fire and fury” would be replaced by paper airplanes loaded with spitballs. Rubber bands would replace rifles.

Even if the range limitations of the new weapons could be overcome, any attack would have minimal impacts on human life and the environment. The budgetary savings alone would likely allow nations to eliminate poverty and improve education and health care within a decade. Granted, clean-up might be messy, but a few strong rainstorms would likely result in the military material bio-degrading at a rapid rate.

State speeches would no longer be perfunctory affairs of meaningless words. Attendees would be too busy passing notes or trying to fling pencils into the ceiling to pay the speaker much mind.

Likewise, interpreters could promote attentiveness by slipping in loose translations to ensure listeners were truly listening. A speech where a leader discusses the democratic values of “underpants and toilets” is much more interesting than one that discusses “understanding and tolerance.”

Handshakes as well would become fraught with danger, as one would never know if that pat on the back was a gesture of goodwill or whether your colleague was slapping a note onto your back. Imagine the hilarity of seeing a prominent world leader walking up to the podium to deliver a speech on economic reforms with a sticky-note on the back of his/her tailor-made suit stating “I still sleep with my teddy bear” or “Leader X loves Leader B.”

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of all would be the photo-op. World leaders would no longer push aside prime ministers from lesser-known countries, as no one would want to be in the front row. After all, there would be a willing group of leaders standing behind you waiting to flash “bunny ears” on the back of your head just as the cameras flashed. A little humility is a good thing for humankind.

We are all familiar with the proverb “May you live in interesting times.” Without a doubt, these are among the most interesting times many of us have ever lived through. It is easy to become mired in despair and frustration over the intrigues in government and the path down which the world seems headed. However, as recent headlines should remind us, so much of this is nothing more than the politics of junior high.

That is why the personal name-calling should make us laugh out loud. As frustrating as these times may be, we have to look to the light at the end of the tunnel. We can hope that soon the pre-adolescent tyranny will be replaced by the mature and level-headed rule of high school, where cliques and clothing determined the world order.



**Debates in Congress could be settled with swirlies and wedgies.**

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