

On My Mind
2/23/99

What is one to make of the sudden appearance of boat-load after boat-load of undocumented Chinese - all from the same province in China - on Guam? It isn't as though there's been some disaster there that has forced them to flee. And even if there had been, it would seem far more natural for them to have fled to somewhere closer than Guam.

It's pretty clear the whole set-up is a scam - being carried out against gullible but ambitious victims by greedy, heartless and amoral sleazeballs of the worst sort. The Chinese boat people apparently believed they were heading for New York; the scammers obviously knew they weren't.

But the scammers aren't being all that smart, either, since they apparently thought they could bring in hundreds of boat people without either the boat people or themselves being discovered. One or two - or maybe even a family of five - could probably be smuggled in undetected, but hundreds at a time? Or was the intent, from the very beginning, that at least a few of the boat-people would actually be admitted to U.S.?

Yet one wonders why there hasn't been immediate protest to Chinese authorities - to ambassadors in Japan, the U.S., or even the FAS, if not to authorities in China itself. One wonders why, if newspaper accounts that the boat people are carrying names of Guamanians and Guam phone numbers are correct, the scammers on Guam haven't been apprehended. Or, if either of those events have occurred, why that hasn't been reported in the press.

There's still the question, as well, of "Why now?" What has changed to bring on this invasion? What confluence of events has brought this about? Does it relate to some international policy issue? Just what is the message here? If anyone knows, would we be told?

And just what is the status of those Chinese who were brought to Tinian? Because they are on U.S. property, will they, too, be eligible to ask for asylum? or, because they are in the CNMI, will they not be eligible to apply for asylum? If the former, why has INS said it will not bring any subsequent Chinese boat-people to Tinian? If the latter, it does seem, at the least, sort of arbitrary, unfair.

I hope CNMI officials, from the Governor and the Washington Rep on down, don't miss an opportunity to remind federal officials that equally large numbers of Chinese could be deliberately landing in the CNMI as well if immigration in the CNMI were under federal control. In fact, that the Chinese are not, apparently, heading for the CNMI would seem to indicate that at least the scammers are pretty well informed about the difference in political status between Guam and the CNMI.

Nonetheless, though landing on one of the CNMI's Northern Islands isn't easy to begin with, and would not lead to possible asylum in any case, it might behoove the powers that be to do some extra patrolling of that area as well. One way to do that - if it hasn't been done already - is to ask

the airlines that come into Guam and Saipan from that direction to keep an eye out for the Chinese boat-people, just in case.....

<center>* * *</center>

Another question to ponder: Why wasn't it Lt. Governor Jesus P. Sablan who was sent to the Marshalls to represent the CNMI at the meeting of the Council of Micronesian Chief Executives?

It's understandable that Teno might not have wanted to leave during this Chinese "invasion" crisis, but that still doesn't explain why some elected leader wasn't sent instead of a staff person.

Not that we don't admire and respect the staff person involved, but it just didn't seem appropriate.

<center>* * *</center>

One might also ask: what is one to make of the Kosovo mess - and the growing U.S. presence there? the likelihood of involvement by American ground troops? Why Kosovo, and not Rwanda? or the Sudan? or Angola?

There is also the very fundamental question: can killing one another really bring peace? Does it really foster, improve, the concepts of humanitarianism, the brotherhood of man? (you should forgive the lack of p.c.)

"War is at best a defensive necessity; it is never a civilizing exercise. Even - or perhaps especially - a war in the name of morality brutalizes all, " writes Benjamin Schwarz, a correspondent for the Atlantic Monthly, and former executive editor of World Policy Journal, as quoted in a recent article in the <I>Pacific Daily News</I>.

Warns Schwarz, "Given an enemy to hate, a righteous cause, and fear for its men and women in uniform, America - like any country - will treat military operations not as a delicate and limited means to bring about a more moral world, but as a blunt instrument to inflict pain."

What if those billions of dollars spent on and by the Pentagon were, instead, spent training people around the world in alternate dispute resolution?

<center>* * *</center>

A recent <I>Consumer Report</I> article on money matters suggests that its readers should re-assess their choice of banks, particularly in this day of mega-mergers. If one shops carefully, the magazine declares, "you can still find accounts that provide free checking, require a modest minimum balance, let you use a wide network of ATMS's without paying a penalty for the privilege - even let you visit a live teller. Problem is, it's become nearly impossible to find all those features at one bank."

Not on Saipan, it isn't. Which sort of puts in a nutshell, so to speak, what it is that living here is

all about.