

# Obama help puts Chicago on level field for Olympics



**DAVID S. BRODER** says the president's decision to travel to Denmark to schmooze members of the IOC puts the U.S. bid on an equal footing with Rio's.

**H**E may have bigger challenges now and in years to come, but nothing will endear Barack Obama to some of us more than his decision to take a quick trans-Atlantic round trip to lobby the International Olympic Committee on behalf of Chicago's bid to be the host city of the 2016 summer games.

I'm astonished that some carping critics have faulted Obama for making the 18-hour excursion to Copenhagen to schmooze the IOC members who on Friday will decide among Rio de Janeiro, Tokyo, Madrid and Chicago. Tip O'Neill taught a previous generation that all politics is local, and this is the best favor the president could possibly do for his adopted hometown.

I have to believe that Obama regards this as no sacrifice. It's been almost a year since he last deployed his smarts and charm in a contest where votes will be counted and a clear winner emerge.

Campaigners like to campaign, and this is a fair fight.

Chicago has the edge on Tokyo, which already has hosted the Olympics. As for Madrid, the 2012 games will be in London, and there's no good reason why Europe should have the honors twice in a row. But Rio has a strong case, not just because of its beauty and the growing economic clout of Brazil, but because South America has never had the Olympics to enjoy.

The only Olympics insider I know (my oldest son, George, who was a staff member at the Los Angeles games) told me Sunday, before Obama agreed to make the trip, that the scuttlebutt favored Rio's bid, in part on the equity argument and in part because the Brazilian president was already committed to lobbying in Copenhagen.

Now, no one will have a more powerful delegation on the scene than Chicago: the president, first lady Michelle Obama, two Illinois-based Cabinet members, Obama's chief campaign fundraiser — and Oprah Winfrey.

They will point out that the Summer Olympics have not been in the United States since the Atlanta games in 1996. I was lucky enough to get to that spectacle and, 12 years earlier, to Los Angeles. For a one-time high school and college hurdler, the track meets and other competitions were irresistible.

What I didn't know before those experi-

ences was that the Olympic audience is as much of an attraction as the athletes. People gather from all over the globe, and they come, not to show each other up, but to revel in a shared experience, the likes of which I've never known elsewhere.

I'd love for my hometown of Chicago and its good people, many of whom have been waiting many decades for the Cubs to break through, to learn what it means to be part of the Olympics.

And equally, I'd love for the world to get to know Chicago — with its magnificent lakefront, its healthy, diverse neighborhoods and its mayor, Richard Daley, who is as smart and accomplished a builder of urban success as anyone in the world.

In 1893, Chicago played host to the World's Columbian Exposition, which for decades was the model for all other world's fairs. The main building of that event remains in place, now the Museum of Science and Industry, a treat for children and adults alike.

With help from Obama, Chicago can do as much or more for this century. Keep your fingers crossed.

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William Safire, the New York Times columnist who died on Sunday at 79, was a joy in so many ways that one can hardly count them. Start with his love of the English language and the wonderful, non-pedantic way he wrote about it in his weekly Times magazine columns. Add his genius for inventing outrageous puns and dropping them into his essays. And then start cataloguing his political polemics, always fresh and unpredictable.

He was the most unconventional of conservatives, fiercely protective of privacy and individual rights, appreciative of pols who played the game right, no matter what their ideology. On the many Sunday mornings when the late Tim Russert would match us against each other on the *Meet the Press* roundtables, I used to love sparring with him on the air, and then listening to him after the show over coffee and bagels. I never thought he got the better of our arguments, but I never was in doubt that he was the one the audience would pick as the boon companion.

Broder's e-mail address is davidbroder@washpost.com.



# Research on the Internet can lead to skewed results

**Diverse voices stifled in Taiwan, China searches**

By STEVEN W. LEWIS

**S**WORDS on both sides of the Taiwan Strait are not yet being beaten into shopping carts, but the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) of the mainland and the Nationalist Party (KMT) of Taiwan are dramatically toning down their long war of words. Taiwan's President Ma Ying-jeou of the KMT is seeking to remove trade barriers with the mainland and has shelved plans to become a full member of the United Nations. People's Republic of China's (PRC) President Hu Jintao and the CCP have recently offered their own olive branches: relief supplies for Taiwanese victims of a devastating summer typhoon, joint management of shared fisheries and direct airline flights between the former rivals.

The KMT, the CCP and the American government very much want to know what Americans will think about this new relationship. And yet even a brief examination of America's most commonly used Internet search engines reveals strong obstacles to the formation of an informed American view on the future of China and Taiwan.

When we ask our search engines for information about China and Taiwan, where do they direct us? The answer is clear: Internet search engines are inherently biased and should be used with great caution. A comparison of the most commonly used Web search engines — Google, Yahoo and MSN/WindowsLive/Bing, which account for 90 percent of all searches — suggests there are three subliminal messages behind each set of search results they generate. "Thank you for telling us about yourself: Now please shut up and listen to us tell you about yourself." Because anybody can post information on the Web, the whole spectrum of popular views on any given subject should be found somewhere on the Internet. Unfortunately, as the case of China and Taiwan makes clear, search engines effectively stifle this diversity of voices by unfailingly directing Americans toward traditional media, govern-

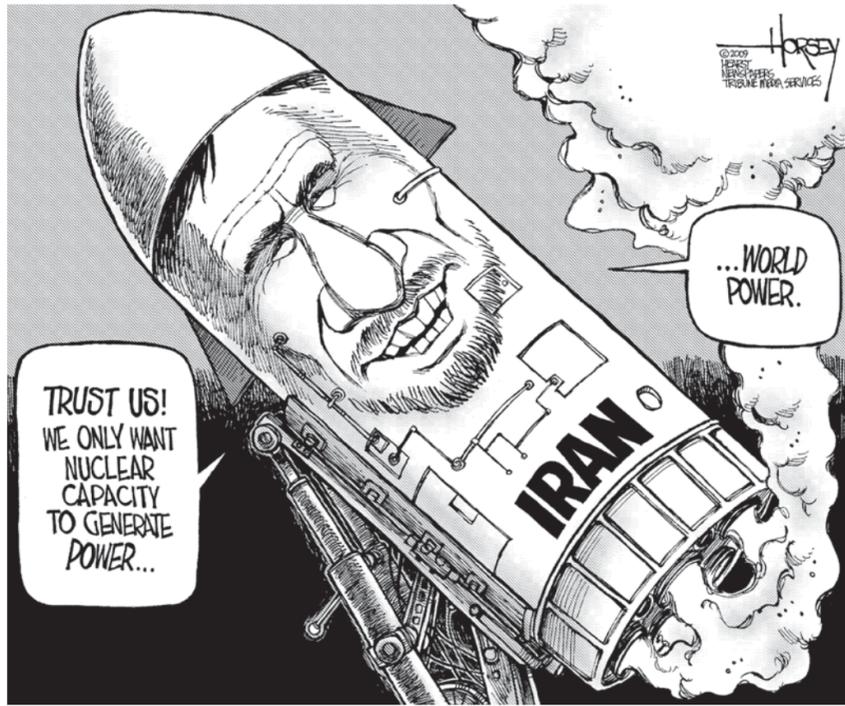
ment and academic Web sites.

Type "China" or "Taiwan" into Google, Yahoo or Bing, and look at the first 100 sites. For Google, some 75 will be links to sites of media, governments and universities overseas. For Yahoo, it is closer to 90. In America we value debate, dialogue and the free exchange of ideas. In American cyberspace, however, our search engines often lead us to hear only our own voices.

"Yes, of course I know the answer: Wait, what was the question?" Will Taiwan cease to exist as it peacefully integrates with China? Google tells us there are 643 million links to "China," 208 million to "Taiwan." Yahoo says 3.04 billion and 1.91 billion, respectively. Bing claims 229 million for "China," 82 million for "Taiwan." Taiwanese might yet take heart in these statistics, noting that their "Web presence" per capita is greater than the PRC's on all three search engines. On the other hand, on Bing both "Atlantis" (120 million) and "Area 51" (470 million) generate more hits than "Taiwan." No search engine can access the entire universe of the Internet, and so each samples in its own quirky, idiosyncratic and mysterious way.

"Welcome to the jungle." Taiwan is a contentious multiparty democracy. The PRC is a one-party state. A search on "China + democracy" and "Taiwan + democracy" on Google reveals among the 100 top results only a few links to political parties or citizen action groups. The same top-100 search on Yahoo produces more of the same for Taiwan. For "China + democracy," however, Yahoo generates more than 69 links to sites discussing the 2008 Guns N' Roses album *Chinese Democracy*. As Harvard political scientist Joseph Nye has argued, America's soft power is its massive cultural and entertainment industries. The sun never sets on the American media empire. Unfortunately, the siren song of our pop culture also leads Yahoo to recommend a music album and interviews with Axl Rose to any American earnestly seeking information about democracy in China. Welcome to the jungle, China and Taiwan.

Lewis is fellow in Asian studies at the Baker Institute for Public Policy, professor in the practice and associate director of the Chao Center for Asian Studies at Rice University.



# Obama's new foreign policy strategy is based on hope



**KATHLEEN PARKER** says it could be painful watching the president attempt to charm adversary nations who previously had been handled with toughness.

**I**N keeping with his campaign promise to talk to America's enemies without precondition, Barack Obama plans to turn his charms on Burma's military junta.

Slowly, we're beginning to understand what hope and change were all about. Translation: Sure hope this change works.

It may be too soon to pass judgment on Obama's new foreign policy strategy, but early returns on his gamble that talking is the best cure are less than reassuring. Each time Obama extends a hand to one of the world's anti-American despots, he is rewarded with an insult (Venezuela's Hugo Chavez) or, perhaps, a missile display (North Korea and Iran).

One may view these episodes as diminishing America's status or as a tolerable annoyance — sort of the way Dobermans view toy poodles. At some point, the big dog reminds the little yapper of his place. Unfortunately,

the American commander in chief is a cat in a dog-eat-dog world.

Obama inarguably was elected in part as a reaction to George W. Bush's big-dawgness. A new American archetype, Obama is the anti-macho man, a new-age intellectual who defeated the old-guard warrior. Whether he can win with his wits in the larger theater remains to be seen, but watching could be painful.

The shift in policy toward Burma, for instance, was announced Monday following the annual theater of the absurd, aka the United Nations General Assembly. Obama spoke eloquently there about the need for cooperation as the world tackles global problems, hitting his familiar theme of responsibility.

Perhaps timed for comedians with writer's block, Obama was followed by Libyan dictator Moammar Gaddafi, with whom Obama shook hands at a dinner in July. It isn't helpful that

Gaddafi looks like a renegade from Ringling Bros. Or that just weeks ago, he hosted a welcome-home celebration for the 1988 Lockerbie bomber-terrorist, who killed 270 people. But Gaddafi's 96-minute diatribe was a prolonged assault on sane people everywhere.

In the midst of such charades, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's emerging Dirty Harry persona is oddly reassuring. On Burma, she has promised to remain tough and continue sanctions pending credible democratic reforms. But, she has added dutifully, sanctions alone haven't gotten us very far. Surely, talking is worth a shot. Or is it?

In the previous administration, the conventional wisdom was that talking to bad actors lent legitimacy where none was deserved. Bush, for instance, ignored Chavez, believing that acknowledgment was empowerment.

Chavez responded by referring to Bush as the devil no fewer than eight times during his 2006 U.N. address. This year, Chavez complimented but also chided Obama for saying one thing and doing another. There may be two Obamas, he said. And more than a few Americans thought he might have a point.

One Obama is loquacious and inspiring. The other seems somewhat removed from threatening realities and people who don't share our appreciation for visionary rhetoric.

Some folks simply aren't talk-able.

Chavez and Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, brothers in their own declared "axis of unity," are cases in point. United in their animus toward the U.S., they've become so close they're practically exchanging jewelry.

Better than that, they're building financial partnerships that may make sanctions irrelevant and, in a "Memorandum of Understanding," have promised each other military support and cooperation.

While in New York last week, Chavez did a little PR work, appearing on *Larry King Live*. The former altar boy said he isn't power hungry, as some claim, nor is he mining uranium for Ahmadinejad, as suggested in a report last December by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He, alas, has been misunderstood.

And Iran? Just days before Obama and five other leaders were scheduled to meet in Geneva to discuss Iran's nuclear ambitions, the Islamic Republic test-fired medium-range missiles. In the new era of talk diplomacy, we might call that a pre-emptive strike — a non-verbal gesture worth a million moot words. Then again, there's always hope.

Parker's e-mail address is kathleenparker@washpost.com.