Mandatory Meal Plan Is a Poor Idea for MIT Students

Column by Matthew H. Hersch

Just because I like nuclear weapons, that doesn’t necessarily make me a bad person. Quite the opposite, really. People who tolerate nuclear weapons are a whole lot more reasonable and controllable in suggesting foreign policy than hyperactive warmongers and beatnik non-nukes. And when someone who accepts the inevitability of nuclear weapons actually suggests not confronting it with nuclear confrontation towards another state — as I am about to do — you can be damn sure that he’s thought everything out carefully before he started trying.

I am trying to get around to is North Korea and how the transition from an rogue communist state separated from its U.S.-backed brother South Korea by a U.N. demilitarized zone and once soldiers start going hungry, revolution. North Korea is one of the last holdouts of oppressive Marxism, and South Korea is a nation racked by separation and a history of struggling democracy and economic collapse. The North is isolated and the South has expressed interest in reunification. The North is on the verge of economic collapse. The major sticking point, though, has been nuclear weapons.

The North has a nuke development program to balance the threat of U.S. weapons. It has never been exposed to the world. The North Koreans refuse to go along with the plan because they won’t allow inspections into the country. Sometimes, though, they say they will. It is probably cheaper to put kitchens in East Campus and Senior House than to renovate them. Walker, Leistikow, and Netterwold would be significantly increased.

The North could also escape retaliation from the U.S. forces into the sea in 1950, we didn’t use nukes. The United States, as explained by former defense secretary Robert S. McNamara, has adopted a policy of "zero first use" of nuclear weapons — it would never think of using nuclear weapons, especially in Third World conflicts, unless it was first attacked with them. The United States and North Korea would be mutually deterred from escalating conventional wars into nuclear confrontations. Besides, non-nuclear weapons like fuel-air explosives pack the same bang as nukes but spread less political (and physical) fallout.

In short, a North Korean bomb is nothing to worry about, because the United States has always acted as if the North had one already, through either its associations with China or those with the USSR. Instead of worrying about the bomb, the United States should concentrate on containing, isolating, and squashing North Korea by forcing it to continue an expensive nuclear weapons program.

Nuclear Standoff in Korea Key to Crushing the North

Column by Douglas D. Keller

The main issue behind the proposal of a mandatory meal plan for all students in on-campus housing appears to be the social role dormitory cafeterias play. There are members of the House Dining Committee who feel that closing the dormitory cafeterias will affect the social life of dorm residents. This is a question of control, because most students like the dorm cafeterias, so what social benefits would be lost by closing them?

I live at East Campus, and as is the case in other dormitories with kitchen facilities, there are groups of people who get together to cook meals. Similar cooking groups exist atjessey Hall and Senior House, allowing residents to get together over a meal and discuss the day's events, politics, or whatever crosses their minds. If the dorm cafeterias serve to bring dorm residents together, so do the cooking groups and kitchens in dorms without cafeterias. So forcing a meal plan upon students saves one social environment at the expense of another. Not to mention that students aren't eating in dorm cafeterias, but they are eating in dorm kitchens.

If you ask me, we should tell the North to keep its bomb and shut up.

Relations between North and South have thawed noticeably in the last few months, though, for a couple of reasons. South Koreans are suffering from West Germany reconciliation sickness, and the North is on the verge of economic collapse. The major sticking point, though, has been nuclear weapons.

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ARA doesn't have the need for an increase in the number of student rooms. With the advent of UROPs and the closing of dormitory meal plans, the dormitory meal plans will not serve to force students to walk back from Whitehead or Sloan to their dorm to eat dinner. At best there would be a slight increase in dorm cafeteria attendance. But the impact on the three central eating establishments (Walker, Leistikow, and Netterwold) would be significant.

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In the mid-1980s the Institute adopted a mandatory commons plan for all students on campus. After two years the plan was scrapped because Walker had become overcrowded at dinner, with lines of more than an hour. In response, the Institute decided that it would be cheaper to put kitchens in East Campus and Senior House than to renovate Walker. The plan didn't work then, and there's no reason it should work now.

The fact facing the House Dining Committee is simple: Dorm cafeterias are losing a lot of money. My solution is simple: Close them. Students don't eat in them and ARA doesn't want them, so close the dorm cafeterias. Remodel Walker and Leistikow so they can handle the increased load of students. Remodel the dormitory cafeterias and turn them into lounges or rooms which could eliminate freshman overcrowding. Implementation of my plan will cost the Institute money, but some of the expense can be recouped through an increase in the number of student rooms.

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