Editorial

Bad policy to blame in Iran Air disaster

The recent Persian Gulf tragedy involving the destruction of an Iran Air passenger jet and its 290 passengers by an American cruiser illustrates, once again, the absurdity of the Reagan Administration's "in harm's way" policy in that troubled region.

Time and time again, in Lebanon, Honduras and now the Gulf, President Reagan has been quick in sending in troops to global hot spots. Usually too quick, especially when those giving the orders haven't thought their policies through all the way.

In that light, the 290 victims share a similar place in history with the more than 200 Marines killed on a "peacekeeping" mission in Beirut. The death tolls are the result of U.S. forces being in the wrong place for the wrong reasons.

Defending tankers in international waters is not in itself a bad idea. But the Gulf is a rough neighborhood and the United States shouldn't be the only policeman. A United Nations or similar multi-national force seems much more sensible, especially since the threatened tankers carry most of their petroleum to Japan and Western Europe.

Under the Administration's current policy, it is hard to fault the commander of the USS Vincennes, Capt. Will Rogers III. After the tragedy, investigations revealed that the Airbus was in fact flying through commercial airspace, that it was flying too slow to be an F-14, and that, in any event, an F-14 interceptor is designed to shoot down planes; it lacks the payload to threaten a cruiser.

That all comes out in hindsight, though; hindsight not available to a commander in a wartime situation. Rogers has assumed responsibility for his actions, but the larger blame rests with his commander, President Reagan.

Now vindicated, Meese still looks like sleaze

There was a collective sigh from the nation last week as U.S. Attorney General Edwin Meese tendered his long-awaited resignation. But now, even as the reputed "sleaze king" is leaving, he continues to blunder on his way out.

First of all, there's this whole laughable talk of "vindication." Because a special prosecutor's report failed to accumulate enough damaging evidence to precipitate a trial, Meese said that his reputation is now unsullied.

Given the two special investigations into his past, the numerous testimonies before hearing committees and the seemingly endless allegations over corruption, cronyism, and shady deals, it appears unlikely that Meese will ever be looked upon as "clean." Not that Meese particularly needs a reputation; we assume that when he looks for a new job, he'll use one of the many political favors he's owed by the GOP old-boy network and get set up with a cushy, safe job out of the public eye.

If that should happen, Meese can't return the favor. Presumably, Meese is stepping down to help out the Republican cause in November. He's far too late.

Meese's "vindication" will not stop Michael Dukakis and the Democratic Party from harping on the excesses of Meese and other dirty dealers inside the Reagan Administration. Nor will it erase the memories of Meese's Constitutional-busting campaigns against drugs, pornography and personal rights.

But some people never learn. Conservative columnist George F. Will, darling of the right, recently suggested that President Reagan nominate Judge Robert Bork as the next Attorney General. That foolish notion — if it happens — might be the only thing that will make this country forget Edwin Meese anytime soon.

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Commentary

Don't bring sweatshops home

At a time when most women work, the average American family depends on two wage earners, and 10 million children under the age of six need quality day care facilities, the chance to work at home with flexible hours and no child care worries sounds too good to be true, right?

Commentary by Jay Mazur

It is too good to be true. But this is exactly the candy coating that the Reagan Administration is putting on one of the most bitter pills it has asked the American people to swallow: the legalization of industrial homework.

In 1942, the federal government banned homework in seven apparel and apparel-related industries. Long experience had shown that fair labor standards — minimum standards set by laws governing wages, hours, benefits and conditions — could never be enforced when industrial work took place in the home. Soon after the Reagan Administration took office, then-Labor Secretary Donovan tried to junk the four-decade-old homework ban. In 1984, the prohibition on homework in one industry, knitted outerwear, was lifted.

Now the Labor Department proposes to end the ban in five of the six remaining industries; gloves and mittens, buttons and buckles, handkerchiefs, embroideries, and most jewelry. These industries employ 75,000 workers in virtually every state. The Administration says that times have changed since 1942 — with so many working mothers, women need flexibilitiy and choice.

An administration widely renowned for its image-making will try to create an acceptable picture of the homeworker: Mom stringing beads by the fire while she watches over the kids. The reality of industrial homework, however, is nothing like this contrived portrait. It is a grim reality of exploitation of some of the most vulnerable workers in American society.

Little has changed since 1942. Long before the ban, industrial homework was an inextricable part of the scourge of apparel sweatshops. It was easy to increase production by passing out piecework to be done at home by desperate immigrants, mostly women, newly arrived from Central and Southern Europe.

Today, the sweatshop is back. Thousands of unscrupulous employers thumb their noses at rarely enforced labor laws, evade taxes and scoff at local fire and health codes. Many have already begun to employ homeworkers, despite the ban. Their employees are newly arrived immigrants desperate for work — this time from the Caribbean Basin, South America and Asia but, once again, virtually all are women. Most are mothers; few speak much English; and many are undocumented aliens.

Lifting the ban on industrial homework will give employers a green light to exploit these women workers. Homeworkers will get little "flexibility" or "choice" from these bosses. The vast majority will be forced to work for sublegal wages; to work long and unusual hours; to do without basic benefits like Workers' Compensation and Social Security; and to risk unsafe and unhealthy conditions. Perhaps most appalling, legalized homework will mean a return to child labor. Low-income immigrant women workers will be powerless to resist the production demands of their bosses, even when this means that their children work too.

Women with young children do need choices in the labor markets to acheive real economic freedom and equality. They need good jobs at decent wages and quality affordable child care. The Administration proposes instead to restore them the "right" to work long hours at home for cheap wages hunched over a sewing machine.

To its lasting shame, the Reagan Administration is attempting cynically to use the legitimate needs of women workers as a cover for what is actually an attack on the fair labor standards which protect all workers, especially those, like women, who are among the most vulnerable.

Jay Mazur is president of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, AFL-CIO.

Letters Policy

The Emerald will attempt to print all letters containing comments on topics of interest to the University community. Comments must be factually accurate and refrain from personal attacks on the character of others.

Letters to the editor must be limited to no more than 250 words, legible, signed and the identification of the writer must be verified when the letter is submitted.

The Emerald reserves the right to edit any letter for length or style. Letters should be turned into the Emerald office, Suite 300, EMU.