

Bombs are falling; does anybody care?

Familiarity breeds complacency, or so it would seem after the latest round of bombings in Iraq. Just this past week, the United States unleashed \$30 million worth of Tomahawk missiles into a Baghdad suburb. Ho hum. Another day, another air raid.

Even the fact that one of the missiles struck a hotel in downtown Baghdad failed to raise more than a cursory, "Huh?"

Without discussing the justification for the attacks, shouldn't any use of American military force be of utmost concern to the American people? Who do you think paid for those \$30 million firecrackers?

From 1941 to 1975, the American military was engaged in a virtual merry-go-round of war, and through the miracle of television, America became desensitized to the act of war. Sure, they were weary of the burden, but seeing bombs fall and bullets fly raised no more interest than the daily weather report.

After a five-year respite, the military proved it had sunk to new lows when it failed miserably in its attempt to rescue the American hostages in Tehran. America's elite forces couldn't even get airborne.

Not until Oct. 25, 1983, did America begin utilizing its armed forces. On that day, U.S. Marines and Army Rangers defeated a group of Cuban construction workers and liberated American medical students trapped on the island of Grenada.

This was big news. Regular programming was interrupted, newspapers ran banner headlines on the front page, and the topic of discussion everywhere focused on the use of American forces.

Three years later, American planes bombed Tripoli, Libya, and again American responded with shock, anger or joy. But at least it responded. There was interest.

Since 1989, U.S. troops have been increasingly active, beginning with the invasion of Panama and ending most recently with the Persian Gulf War.

It seems to be a result of the latter conflict that America has grown bored with the image of American bombs flattening numerous buildings.

Technically, the United States can justify its actions because the war isn't officially over. Rather, there is, or at least was, a cease-fire in place. The cease-fire agreements have been violated and renewed action is legally justifiable.

But that shouldn't be cause for apathy. Military action puts lives at risk and creates huge economic costs for those on either side of the barrel.

When Americans cease being interested in the actions of their military, the ability of the military to act unilaterally, without being forced to answer for its actions, increases dangerously.

If the media, including this paper, are doing their jobs, the American people should have no excuse for being disinterested. Pay attention.



COMMENTARY

New rulings obscure Roe vs. Wade

By Sally Sheklow

Jan. 22, 1993, marks the 20th anniversary of Roe vs. Wade. Twenty years of safe, legal — not always accessible — abortion. For supporters of women's rights around the country, this is a time of celebration and reflection.

Although we are all pleased to be celebrating the 20th anniversary of Roe vs. Wade and the inauguration of the new pro-choice administration, we sadly remember the hypocrisy, danger and fear that engulfed the lives of women during the "bad old days" when abortion was illegal.

Prior to legalization, abortion complications had reached epidemic proportions. Many hospitals throughout the country had specific wards set up to treat women for uterine perforation, hemorrhage, massive pelvic infection and incomplete abortion. Untold numbers of women died in these wards. Many women never made it to the hospital.

Dr. Sam Barr was a physician in Pittsburgh during the 1950s and 1960s. Horrified at the many abortion complications he witnessed during his tenure, he recalls one particular woman's situation (as cited in *A Woman's Book of Choices*, Chalker & Downer, 1992):

"I'll never forget one patient: She was 32 years old and the mother of two children. She was admitted through the emergency room. ... Her symptoms were relatively mild. Her pelvis was moderately tender and her uterus was only slightly enlarged, but she did have a positive pregnancy test.

"There was one other finding: a small puncture point with a little bit of bleeding at the entrance to her uterus. ... 'I had to do it,' she said. 'I went to this lady who put a coat hanger up in me.' With luck I thought the worst diagnosis would be that this woman's bladder had been perforated. That would not be pleasant, but hopefully there would be no systematic problem.

"I started massive antibiotic treatment immediately, beginning with several transfusions to replace the blood she had

lost. Three hours later, I learned I was wrong. The laboratory studies indicated an infection with gas gangrene. ... I found her slipping rapidly into heart failure.

"The last thing I remember her saying to me was, 'I know you tried. Figure some way to tell my kids, they won't understand at all. Tell them for me somehow, I don't want them to think me bad.' She lost consciousness, and then a little bit later, just before dawn, she died."

Women's stories of illegal and dangerous abortions were commonly shared in the consciousness-raising groups of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Legal access to abortion came to be seen as a prerequisite to women's equality.

Feminists understood that in order for women to have control over their lives — or perhaps even to contemplate their own future — women had to have control over their child bearing.

Reform came gradually. Abortion was available in a few states, but the vast majority of women who needed them couldn't afford the travel expenses and exorbitant cost of the hospital stay required in some states.

In some of these states, women were forced to undergo a psychiatric evaluation. Women in Oregon were required to consult with a physician who had to substantiate that continued pregnancy threatened the woman's health. The humiliation, duress and barriers to health care created by these requirements meant that many women could not obtain abortions.

Finally, in 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court handed down the Roe vs. Wade decision. In it, the court said that the "right of privacy ... founded in the 14th Amendment's concept of personal liberty ... is broad enough to encompass a woman's decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy."

The court held that the state had no compelling interest in regulating abortion in the first trimester of pregnancy and could only regulate second trimester abortions to protect women's health. For the first time in more than 100 years, in

every state in the nation, a woman could legally exercise control over her own body.

Roe vs. Wade was the first major victory in a long war that is still being waged against women. Over the past 20 years, the legislatures and courts have been grinding away at reducing the protections granted in Roe to such an extent that women's health is imperiled.

Medicaid funding cuts, parental consent, waiting periods, state-mandated anti-abortion informed consent, gag rules and viability testing are some of the major setbacks for women.

Women's access to abortion has been hampered by mail bombs, vandalism, assaults, blockades, pickets, arson and harassment from Operation Rescue, Right to Life and other religious extremists and terrorists for years.

The Supreme Court's decision last week condoned violence outside abortion clinics by saying there were no constitutionally based protections for women seeking abortion. The court has once again denied women's rights to make a private decision unhampered by the state and abandoned vital legal protection outside of medical facilities.

(The Feminist Women's Health Center's injunction and judgment against Advocates for Life is under appeal, but reversal is doubtful because the legal issues involved are different than those involved in last week's Bray decision. Our injunction currently remains in full force).

It is crucial that the public not be lulled into complacency after the election of a prochoice president. Restrictions on a woman's ability to obtain an abortion — and anti-abortion terrorism — will continue unless we fight to stem the tide of regressive legislation and repressive court decisions.

The protections provided by Roe vs. Wade are becoming dangerously obscured. This is creating a crisis in the lives of women in need of reproductive health care.

Sally Sheklow is development director for the Feminist Women's Health Center.

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