

Statistics alone won't stop AIDS

Thousands of rush-hour commuters drive past a gruesome three-car pileup on the freeway. After surveying the crash, they drive away, double-checking their seat belts and glancing more than usual into their rear-view mirrors.

The TV news carries live coverage of the aftermath of an airline disaster that kills 200 people. Travel agents soon report a noticeable decline in plane ticket sales.

And a story in the newspaper about a mugging on a lesser known street may have people picking a different route home.

Sometimes people need to see a single incident, particularly when it's close to home, before they'll start taking extra safety precautions. It's an unfortunate truth about human nature: grim statistics alone aren't always enough to change people's behavior.

Especially when it comes to sex.

That's why the newest grim statistic — the discovery that AIDS is now the No. 1 killer of Americans between the ages of 25 and 44 — may not have as much impact as it should.

People who are, in most other ways, responsible and cautious, are still distressingly carefree about AIDS. That carelessness has now led AIDS past accidents, cancer, heart disease and murder to become the most prolific taker of young lives in the United States.

The number of AIDS-related deaths has been increasing dramatically since the first few cases were diagnosed. But people's sexual behavior still hasn't been modified enough to prevent a growing number of deaths.

The statistics, which are becoming more and more unavoidable, definitely point to a need for people to change. But hearing about thousands of deaths often does less to change people's attitudes than hearing about just one: someone they know.

To some degree, that's already happened. A few celebrities with the disease have "brought it home," so to speak, but not nearly so well as a friend or a neighbor would. Many people still don't know anyone to be diagnosed with the disease.

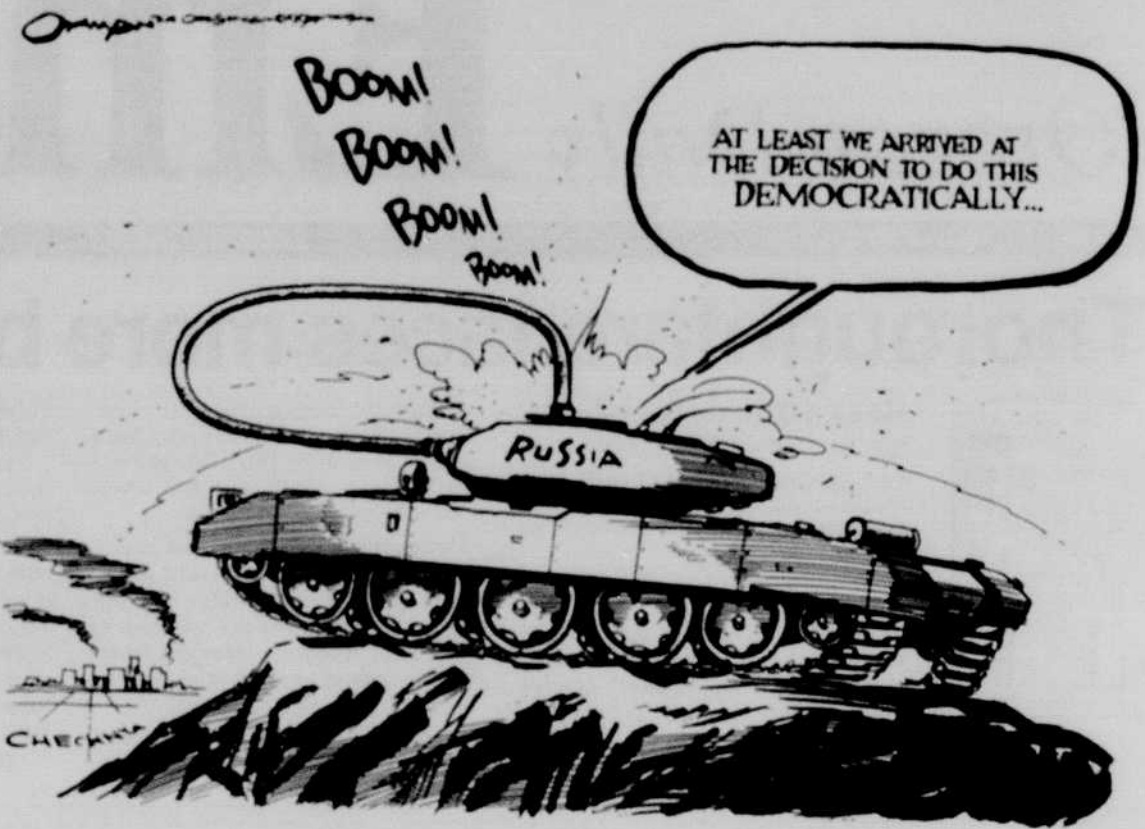
If the number of AIDS-related fatalities continues to grow, that will change. Everyone will know someone with the disease within a handful of years. Maybe then people will start "buckling their seat belts" — practicing safe sex, using clean needles, getting tested.

To be sure, some people have started doing these things already. But why must so many people see that car accident, that plane crash, that mugging, before they make the obvious adjustments? Why aren't statistics enough?

The question is hard to answer. Some people don't trust statistics — as evidenced by all the people who refuse to fly, despite the fact that airplanes are the safest transportation available.

But, most people just don't think. They need more than numbers.

And, because the number of AIDS deaths doesn't singlehandedly prompt people to change, that number will continue to grow.



■ OPINION

Military can't fight two wars

Here's a pretty scenario: You wake up tomorrow morning to learn North Korea has invaded South Korea.

Just to make things fun, on Friday you awaken to the news that Saddam Hussein thought the United States might have its hands a little too full and decides to invade Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

Oil prices skyrocket beyond \$50 a barrel while the Asian financial markets nose dive.

As you might imagine, Americans are a bit edgy. President Clinton comes on the air to ask for peace and to assure Americans that the military is prepared to combat both of the wars simultaneously.

Or is it? The problem is that the General Accounting Office said Tuesday that the military may not be able to handle two simultaneous wars.

Clinton wants the military to be prepared to cover two wars at the same time.

But the GAO said the assumptions made by Clinton administration officials in the Department of Defense were not always workable.

Among the key findings in the GAO report were:

- Plans to deploy Army National Guard combat brigades to a regional war do not consider the difficulty those units have in meeting their peacetime requirements.

- The strategy assumes that the forces involved in peacekeeping operations would be immediately reassigned to one of the major regional conflicts. But some Army support forces and specialized Air Force combat aircraft might encounter difficulty in shifting quickly from peacekeeping missions to the battle front.

- "Current indications are that it would be difficult for the Army to support two conflicts."

This report further shows problems some in Washington have recently had with military funding.

Last week, Pentagon officials said they would request an additional \$2.6 billion in emergency funding for fiscal 1996, warning



BRIAN WOMACK

that a lack of funding would have dire consequences for military readiness.

Late last year, Defense Secretary William Perry was having other funding problems when he said 10 of the Army's 12 divisions were rated at lower readiness levels due to funding shortfalls and a delay by Congress in supplying supplemental appropriations. Following this disclosure, Clinton authorized \$25 billion over the next six years to help alleviate the problem.

But it amazes me that no matter how much the military is cut, all I hear is more calls for military cuts.

I've asked people how they think the deficit should be cut. Typical of most liberals, the response will often be the military needs to be scaled back.

They seem to conveniently forget that the military has already been axed extensively.

In 1989, the national defense was allotted \$90 billion. In 1994, the estimate was around \$70 billion according to the Office of the President's Historical Tables.

These were actual cuts, not just reductions in the projected increases.

Obviously, some reductions were needed when the Cold War ended. But just because the Cold War is over, it doesn't mean the world is a safe place.

Here are a few examples:

Earlier this week, Ecuador and Peru clashed over an agreement that's more than 50 years old by killing each other.

Bosnia-Herzegovina continues to stir trouble and threaten to draw surrounding countries into conflicts almost as old as the ground that helps to cause those conflicts.

Israel and Palestine continue to try to obtain peace in an area that seems to refuse any.

Then there's Vladimir Zhirinovskiy in Russia, an anti-Semite, who drew one in four votes while advocating that Alaska be reacquired by his country.

The world's not necessarily wonderful. It isn't a place full of hippies sitting around campfires singing John Lennon songs.

History has proven over and over again that lasting peace will never come to the world as long as humans are in charge. The Khans, Napoleons, Hitlers and Husseins will always be around, ready to seize any opportunity they can.

That's why the military needs to be ready for these kinds of monsters.

I'm not saying we should return our defense budgets to Cold War levels until it is clearly needed.

But many of us forget that the military is not just another part of the line items in a federal fiscal year budget. It's something that was specifically mentioned as part of the function of the federal government in the Constitution.

In Article 1, Section 7 of the Constitution, a "militia" was established as part of the function of the government.

The vast numbers of government handouts and other wasteful programs are not even mentioned in the Constitution.

Even if we decided to keep scaling back the military, it would not address the serious deficit problems which stem from entitlement spending which will consume the entire federal budget during the next century if something isn't done to scale back the spending.

We should be ready enough militarily to handle two simultaneous wars at a minimum. That's a no-brainer.

But we should question if even this is enough.

Imagine what might happen in that scenario I referred to earlier if some other country decided to invade ours on Saturday.

Wouldn't exactly be waking up to a good day.

Brian Womack is a columnist for the Emerald.

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