

Bosnia: U.S. would act if money were at stake

OUR OPINION: The United States should put its military where its money isn't

"Never again."

While Americans reflect on the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II this year, and politicians deliver poignant, politically beneficial speeches about the Nazi extermination of the Jews, thousands of Muslims are being slaughtered or evicted from their homeland. The death toll in Bosnia-Herzegovina continues to rise, as Orthodox Christian Serb forces shell and "cleanse" United Nations' "safe zones," pushing thousands of Muslim refugees further south.

Since this war began in April 1992, the United States, Britain and other Western countries have been unwilling to get involved in any real way. The United States has sent humanitarian aid (food, clothing, etc.) but no weapons, ground troops, or aircraft that do anything much more than survey the extermination and destruction taking place under their wings. The Clinton administration has been "considering" military action, "threatening" U.S. intervention, and "warning" Serb forces since 1993. Still, nothing has been done. Clinton has said he has no intention of leading American forces into a war in Bosnia without significant support from the United Nations. Of course, forces from several Eastern nations are already there, so new reasons have to be created. Despite Clinton's "outrage" at the Serbs' human rights violations, he has failed to act because it is a politically risky move for a president seeking reelection. More important, Western nations consider Bosnia expendable and unworthy of military assistance because they have no economic ties to the agricultural country. In short, we don't care about the slaughter of Bosnian

Muslims because nothing that happens in this small Balkan country has any real effect on the economy of the United States.

At first glance, it appears that America has frequently come to the aid of countries in similar circumstances. U.S. involvement in World War II helped dismantle Hitler's Third Reich and freed the living from concentration camps. We waged the Gulf War, we were told, because of Saddam Hussein's bloody imperialism and horrific acts of torture against innocent Kurds. Our military action in Haiti "restored democracy." These moral justifications for war were secondary to the real motivation for American action. In all cases, the United States had a vested economic interest in the countries involved. Thus, while it may be politically prudent to portray America as the Great Protector of Human Rights, the thousands of dead bodies in Bosnia reveal our true nature.

Clinton has spent his term selling his vision of the "global community." From the Information Superhighway, to NAFTA and GATT, he has said repeatedly that America cannot afford to isolate itself from the world market. Yet, when the dialogue shifts outside the economic realm, Clinton becomes ambivalent. We are encouraged to do business with a neighbor, but should turn away when we hear him killing his wife and children through the adjoining wall.

American military action in Bosnia will not win an election or remove an economic threat, but it is a moral imperative. Unfortunately, morality has rarely been a spark for political action, and 50 years from now a different president will stand at a mass grave in Zepa and say, "We knew and did nothing. Never again."



OPINION

A needed helpin' of Southern humanity

When we stereotype-hating, open-minded residents of the Great Northwest think of those who dwell in the Deep South, what images come to mind? Well, there's the artery-clogging biscuits and slop those people love to eat. Then there's that music that always has some redneck cowboy moaning about shotguns and mobile home parks. And then there's that ear-wrenching twang — that Southern, back-of-the-woods, my-wife-is-also-my-cousin-sounding noise that those people yelp out whenever they talk.

It's safe to say that all of us who live in this land of free thinking have a pretty good idea of who Southerners are and how they behave. So when a young mother murdered her two beautiful sons in Union, S.C., last October, we North-westerners could easily apply our bias-free knowledge to the case. Those bigoted fools would fight each other for the honor of cinching the rope around the murdering mother's neck.

In light of our expertise, it's difficult to make sense of the news that came out of Union this week. The reports indicated that the jury selection in the Susan Smith double-homicide case was arduously slow. It seems the prosecution was hard-pressed to find 12 jurors and six alternates who would be willing to send Susan Smith to the electric chair even if the evidence supported that sentence.

After 50 jurors had been questioned, only 10 were deemed qualified to sit on the panel. The main reason for the other 40's dismissals? Moral opposition to the death penalty.

Maybe we don't have the case right. This couldn't be the Susan Smith who betrayed our pain and sympathy when she confessed that she had strapped her sons, Michael, 3, and Alex, 14 months, into her red Mazda and rolled them to their death in a nearby lake.

And yet we heard panelist No. 17 tell prosecutors, "I am against the death penalty because two wrongs don't make a right."

In the wake of the news from Union, perhaps we should momentarily put aside our biases against those with that irritating twang. It would appear that these small-town Southerners are quite extraordinary in their ability to champion a vision of humanity over the "human" call to vengeance.

Panelist No. 17 seemed to display this ability. The prospective juror told prosecutors about a personal tragedy in her own life. She said that she understood how "things happen to somebody, that they could go off the deep end."

If only Panelist No. 17 knew just how befitting her commentary was to the accused. Indeed many "things" have happened to Susan Smith.

Her father committed suicide when she was a child. She battled with mental disorders throughout her adolescence. At age 13, it was recommended that she be admitted to a hospital for the treatment of her depression. Her mother and stepfather coldly denied their daughter this assistance. Soon after, Susan was molested by her stepfather.

Five years later, Susan found herself married to a man who would eventually cast her aside after Michael and Alex were born. Given Susan's tortured history, the feelings of inadequacy and confusion that are often associated with parenting could only have been exacerbated by the arrival of her two sons. This was a time of "crisis parenthood" for Susan.

On Oct. 25, after having been told by another lover that he no longer wanted her or her children, Susan's mental anguish reached a boil. The result was a tragedy that we certainly cannot condone but perhaps can try to comprehend.

And now, looking behind wire-rimmed glasses and appearing many years older than the 23 she is, Susan Smith sits silently between her two lawyers. She is taking a daily dose of the anti-depressant Prozac and is not allowed to say much because whenever she does talk, she begs for death. Yet the responses from her neighbors to questions about their moral stance on the death penalty are overpowering.

They have stood proudly, and said: "Only God can take lives" — "Two wrongs don't make a right" — "I couldn't give anyone the death penalty" — "I couldn't live with myself if I did" — "I would never" — "I feel like taking a life because two lives is gone is not going to change the situation."

The lucid words overshadow the dialect that we arrogantly categorize as "quaint." I can only wonder what words would have been uttered by the murderer's peers if the event had occurred somewhere in Lane County.

The people of Union argue for the sanctity of life with more eloquence than any lawyer or judge could ever hope to display. They know that the story of the murderer as well as the murdered must be known before any judgment can be passed, that no form of revenge will bring back the victims and that no person can solve violence with violence. Those close-minded rednecks will never cease to amaze me.

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