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EDITORIAL

Announcing plans for Iraq will help ease public doubt

If bad news items were family holiday spats, then it would be Christmastime at the in-laws' in Iraq.

Two soldiers were killed in Al Anbar province Monday, upping the American military death toll to 786 (573 in hostile action).

And according to a report by Seymour Hersh in *The New Yorker*, "The roots of the Abu Ghraib prison scandal lie not in the criminal inclinations of a few Army reservists but in a decision, approved last year by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, to expand a highly secret operation, which had been focussed on the hunt for Al Qaeda, to the interrogation of prisoners in Iraq."

Monday, a suicide bomber killed Izzedine Salim, the president of the U.S.-appointed Iraqi Governing Council. Salim isn't the first council member to die in an attack; Aquila al-Hashimi also died in one September 2003.

President Bush lamented, "The terrorists know that a free Iraq will be a major defeat for the cause of terror, so they are trying to shake our confidence and will."

However terrorists would view a free Iraq aside, these attacks are certainly aimed at shaking coalition forces' "confidence and will." But what's increasingly murky is what exactly a "free Iraq" would actually look like, or how the coalition is going to build it.

Still unclear is who will receive what governing powers several weeks from now during the much-touted transfer of power to local control.

Worse, more than a year after "major combat" operations have ended, the Bush administration has announced no long-term Iraq strategy, including the conditions for pulling out.

The United States, at least has some medium- to long-range plans for the region; the Pentagon announced recently that it would transfer 3,600 troops from the Korean border — about 10 percent of the standing American force there — to Iraq.

If nothing else, reassigning soldiers from the last front of the Cold War to the principal front of the increasingly loosely defined war on terrorism, and from one 'Axis of Evil' nation to another, exemplifies a shift in military priorities.

But if obvious inferences are the best indicator that the American public — not to mention the world — has of the American objective in the region (at least, in terms of anything more specific than "the freedom of the Iraqi people"), it's no surprise that the Iraqi occupation seems like an increasingly disenchanting proposition.

So, the coalition should announce to whom they'll transfer power several weeks from now immediately, and then announce a long-term plan for Iraq. This plan will serve several purposes to benefit coalition forces and Iraqi civilians alike. At the least, it will provide a psychological certainty for everyone in the region. The present vacuum of ambiguity is a breeding ground for the fear and cynicism that terrorists feed on. (And given the recent troubles in Iraq, there's little space for more of either.)

But more broadly, the clarity of specificity might quell some of the international community's concern about the United States' military policy, not to mention doubt about the future of the 21st century's foreign policy powderkeg.



Steve Baggs Illustration

Birth Rights



Chuck Slothower
 Taking issue

Imagine you are a 54-year-old homeless man addicted to cocaine. Imagine your significant other, a 35-year-old homeless woman with her own drug problems, is the mother of four children, three of whom you fathered. All four children have been placed in foster care because you have no ability to care for them.

And now, you may not have any more children under penalty of law.

In a March 31 ruling made public last week, Family Court Judge Marilyn O'Connor of Rochester, N.Y., issued a startling decision: Rodney Evers, the gentleman in question, and a woman identified in court documents as Stephanie P., may not procreate until they prove they can look after their children.

The case, reported in an article by *The Associated Press* that ran in *The Register-Guard*, raises an interesting and important question: Is the right to procreate absolute?

Certainly, the facts of the case are dispiriting. Evers and Stephanie have problems so intractable that it is difficult to imagine the couple ever pulling out of them.

They have shown no ability to help themselves in order to better their future. They rely on the foster care system to sort out the results of their irresponsibility.

And yet, if the ability to have children isn't one of those "unalienable rights" Thomas Jefferson wrote about in the Declaration of Independence, then what is an unalienable right?

Granted, the right to procreate isn't explicitly mentioned in the Constitution, but neither is the right to bake cookies or any of the other rights we exercise with

nary a thought. A right to procreate also runs consistent with the history of judicial interpretation regarding the 14th Amendment, especially given the Supreme Court's ruling in *Eisenstadt v. Baird*. In the 1972 case, Justice William Brennan wrote, "If the right of privacy means anything, it is the right of the individual, married or single, to be free from unwarranted governmental intrusion into matters so fundamentally affecting a person as the decision whether to bear or beget a child."

If you are going to have a constitutional democracy that gives its citizens basic rights, you must accept the fact that some will use those rights irresponsibly. Gun owners will kill people, criminals will get away with crimes and racists will spout hate speech.

Learning to deal with these problems in a way that doesn't infringe on citizens' rights is part of having a mature society based on freedom. Though it might annoy Judge O'Connor, Evers doesn't forfeit his right to procreate simply because he is homeless and addicted to cocaine.

Interestingly, the article notes that O'Connor's ruling has "outraged civil libertarians," as well it should. But Americans should view the concept of an American civil libertarian as redundant, like so-called "free speech zones." Just as all of the United States is one big free speech zone, so should every American proudly wear the label of "civil libertarian."

Thankfully, O'Connor stopped short of ordering the couple to use contraception or obtain an abortion should Stephanie become pregnant. To do so would have sparked valid comparisons to China's one-child policy or Oregon's own deplorable history with eugenics.

Unfortunately, Stephanie did become pregnant two weeks before the judge's order, family members said, and O'Connor could potentially jail Stephanie for contempt.

This would help no one. The state failed Evers and Stephanie — and Evers and Stephanie failed themselves — far too long ago for intervention to do any good.

Whether or not Stephanie goes to jail for a few days, she will likely become pregnant again. Such is the frustration of dealing with the poor. They often fail to help themselves and even continue self-defeating behavior, whether due to poverty, a lack of education or simple helplessness.

In any case, violating the right of Evers and Stephanie to procreate isn't the best way to solve this problem.

Contact the columnist at chuckslothower@dailyemerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

All Americans are responsible for war

Writing of the Abu Ghraib atrocities, *The Washington Post's* Philip Kennicott said on May 5: "Armies are made of individuals. Nations are made up of individuals. Great national crimes begin with the acts of misguided individuals; and no matter how many people are held directly accountable for these crimes, we are, collectively, responsible for what these individuals have done. We live in a democra-

cy. Every errant smart bomb, every dead civilian, every sodomized prisoner, is ours."

We really have to get this. Not only the decision to start this war, but all its revealed atrocities, are our responsibility. The buck stops with each and every one of us who has ever voted or paid taxes.

So what will your response be? Can you do just one proactive thing today, to help correct our abhorrent collective course?

Vip Short
 Eugene

United States should take steps to regain credibility after abuse of Iraqi prisoners

The Iraq "detainee/prisoner" abuse scandal and abuse scandals at other United States detainee facilities have yet to be totally determined. These "detainee/prisoner" abuse situations would not have mushroomed as they have were it not for the arbitrary and secret environments they are cast into.

In contrast, consider our criminal system where "suspects/prisoners" are given a Miranda warning,

allowed a phone call, get legal representation and can have visitors. Here, our rule of law system works because a humane system of transparency, respect and openness discourages dark and secret environments.

The United States can regain our moral high ground by prosecuting those who aid and abet detainee abuse, adapting our rule of law systems for "all" detainees, reaffiliating with the International Criminal Court treaty and more truly interacting with other nations.

John Bauer
 Martinez, Calif.