

Opinion

Numbers tell the truth of Reagan's foreign policy failure

Soon after Jimmy Carter departed the White House and Ronald Reagan moved in, Washington was overcome with consensus. It was that the Carter presidency was a dismal affair in which America's standing in the world sunk to a new low and that of the Soviet Union reached a zenith.



Richard Cohen

A second consensus, somewhat less unanimously shared than the first, then followed: Reagan had restored the status quo ante. In the ad man's slogan of the day, America was standing tall. Just how tall we stand today is open to argument. But one way — and it is only one way — of quantifying the difference between the Carter and Reagan administrations is to use numbers — 312 for the Reagan administration,

eight for the Carter. Those are the numbers of military lives lost in the two administrations.

Carter's sole military debacle was the failed attempt to rescue American hostages in Iran, at the cost of eight lives. Reagan's list is a lot longer. Eighteen servicemen died in the invasion of Grenada; 243 Marines were killed in the bombing of their Beirut barracks; two airmen were lost when their F-111 crashed into the Mediterranean following the bombing of Libya; six servicemen have been killed in El Salvador (five in terrorist attacks and one in a battle with leftist guerrillas) and, just recently, 37 sailors died when the U.S.S. Stark was hit by an Iraqi missile.

That's a rough count. It does not include the 17 Americans killed in the bombing of the American embassy in Beirut, nor does it include the American mercenaries who lost their lives when, along with Eugene Hasenfus, their contra supply plane was downed by Nicaraguan Sandinistas. And the

figures, of course, do not include all the non-Americans who have died in places such as Nicaragua and Angola, fighting the endless wars of the Reagan Doctrine.

Some of these examples are defensible or at least worthy of argument. But the ones that are not — the debacles — are instances of Reagan using the military in a cinematic way — for symbolic reasons. A President who loves to salute, who has indulged the military like an old millionaire with a young mistress, has shown a tendency to use the fleet where he should be using his head. Worse, he attempts to compensate for diplomatic blunders of his own making by showing the flag. Or he hoists it, though, someone takes a shot at it.

Take Lebanon. Having either permitted or encouraged the Israelis to invade that country, having then been fooled by the Syrians into thinking they would accept an American peace plan, Reagan sent in the Marines as a peace-keeping force. Theirs was a mission

impossible: Hold the low ground while showing the flag. In due course, the United States became a player in Lebanon and suffered the consequences.

Now, the administration repeats its mistake. Having secretly sold arms to Iran while insistently proclaiming neutrality in the Gulf war, it dispatched ships to the region to shore up its damaged credibility. It now has virtually aligned itself with Iraq, and the President, in a feat of illogic, blamed Iran — "the real villain" — for the attack on the Stark. The vaunted Reagan amnesia is once again selectively applied. He seems to have forgotten that Iraq started the war with Iran. And he seems to have forgotten all those Iranian moderates we once courted, his one-time justification for the arms sale.

The consequences of sending warships to do the work of diplomats can be disastrous. Consider what would have happened if the Iranians, and not the Iraqis, had accidentally killed 37 Americans. No doubt, the

administration would have retaliated and we would now be engaged in hostilities with the very regime we wooed with missiles, cakes and autographed Bibles. In that event, Ayatollah would probably respond with a wave of terrorism unparalleled for the Middle East. It would then be one hell of a cake to mollify him.

U.S. foreign policy resembles the pudding Winston Churchill would eat because it lacked "theme." A word that does not conform to the neat West division of Reagan ideology confounds us at every turn. A military apparatus built to intimidate the Soviets has, instead, been dispatched like dreadnoughts of colonial powers into unstable areas of the Third World. Twice now, servicemen have been in their sleep, then transformed from victims to heroes by Reagan's facile rhetoric.

The consensus that once firmly gripped Washington is a bit shaky. Unlike those who try to explain Reagan's policies, numbers don't lie. Copyright 1987, Washington Post Writers Group

Fathers and the art of holding babies

They have no handles.

And even though babies look a bit like footballs, they arrive without handy leather laces to tell the fingers where to rest.

Rick Smith
Guest Columnist

Most men are culturally unprepared for the art of Baby Holding.

After all, a baby can't be palmed like a basketball or juggled like a bank account or hoisted like a mug of beer.

A baby looks solid enough, sure. But try to pick one up. It's a little like lifting a 15-pound blob of squirming, formless Jello.

Think it's easy?

Grab a baby under the armpits. Go right ahead. The arms go up and the baby comes down.

Lift a baby by clutching its stomach and a chorus of grandmothers squawk: "Watch-the-neck, watch-the-neck, watch-the-neck!"

Ah, the neck. High-school sex-education classes never warned about baby necks. Lamaze instructors never said a word.

Only after the baby is born, only when a nurse prepares to hand the newborn to the father for the first time, does she casually mention: "Oh yeah. I almost forgot. Baby necks are about as brittle as uncooked spaghetti. Sneeze and you'll snap the kid's head right off."

Nurses. For a new father, to watch a nurse in a hospital nursery is to know humility. Nurses handle babies as ho-hum as if they were flipping hamburgers.

Over the baby goes onto its stomach. Under the stomach her fingers slide. Up comes the baby. All in one fluid motion. All without snapping off the head. Amazing.

When Annie was born four and a half months ago, I hit upon a brilliant idea: travel the country and photograph men's efforts to hold the same baby.

Such an photographic essay, I imagined, would show not only a man's reaction to holding a baby, but the baby's reaction to the holder.

To be artsy and democratic, I dreamed of using all sorts of subjects: bank presidents, highway-crazed hitchhikers, rodeo cowboys, convicts and so on. Nurses need not apply.

But mothers being what they are, my brilliant plan suffered severe setbacks.

She immediately cut my cast of holders to include only a trusted few family members and friends. No hitchhikers. No bank presidents.

And the eventual results were about what you might expect:

Non-Fathers and New-Fathers acted like they were picking up the flu.

Experienced Fathers were casual. Fresh from the fray, numbed by scooping young children out of harm's way dozens of times a day, holding one more baby was no big deal.

Only Grandfathers — having already served their time as Non, New and Experienced Fathers — seem to truly have mastered the art of Baby Holding.

Picking up a baby for them is like finding a pleasant memory long forgotten. No fear of floppy heads, here.

Their arms say that Baby Holding, like bicycle riding, can't be unlearned.

With the mechanics of infant lifting long behind them,

Grandfathers concentrate on the best part of Baby Holding: the way a baby's hair smells pressed close to your nose; the wriggle of a tiny body snuggled tight and warm; the honest sigh of contentment when a baby's body finally declares: "Not bad. Not perfect, of course. And certainly not Mom."

"But he'll do for now."

"He'll do."

Rick Smith is a staff writer for the Sherman Democrat.



BORKy Pig

Why I'm becoming a kill-joy

I started smoking when I was 18. I enjoy the habit immensely. It's fun to light a cigarette, to hold it, and then to take a long drag, inhale, then blow out the smoke.



Lewis Grizzard

A friend once showed me how to blow smoke rings. I got so good at it I could ring the neck of a Coke bottle from 6 feet.

But smoking will kill you if some nonsmoker doesn't kill you first.

So, I have to give up smoking.

I like to drink. Mainly, I prefer to drink beer and vodka. I like the way they taste and burn my tummy and I like the way I feel when I drink my little friends.

"There are no answers in the bottom of a cocktail glass," a wise man once said.

True. And drinking will kill you too, or

even cause you to kill somebody else, if you're fool enough to drive while you're drinking.

I have to give up the booze.

I like eggs for breakfast. Fried. We used to think eggs were good for us. But now we know if you eat too many eggs, they can raise the level of cholesterol in your body, and you can die from a heart attack.

No more eggs.

I like bacon with my eggs. I like my bacon cooked crisp in lots of grease. If you eat too much bacon, they tell us, you can get cancer and die from that.

Hold the bacon.

I like coffee in the morning. Coffee makes cigarettes taste better too. But coffee has caffeine in it which is not good for you, and what good is coffee anyway if you can't have a cigarette with it?

No more coffee, either.

I used to drink Coca-Cola, a lot of Coca-Cola, which is fattening. I gave up Coke and started drinking Tab which, instead of sugar, had saccharin. Later, we learned if

laboratory mice consumed saccharin, they tend to get cancer. Then, came Nutrasweet. But who knows what that eventually will cause.

To be on the safe side, I've decided to give up all soft drinks.

I like Playboy magazines. But if I read too much of them, I might go to hell. I just read Sports Illustrated now, except for the bathing suit issue, of course.

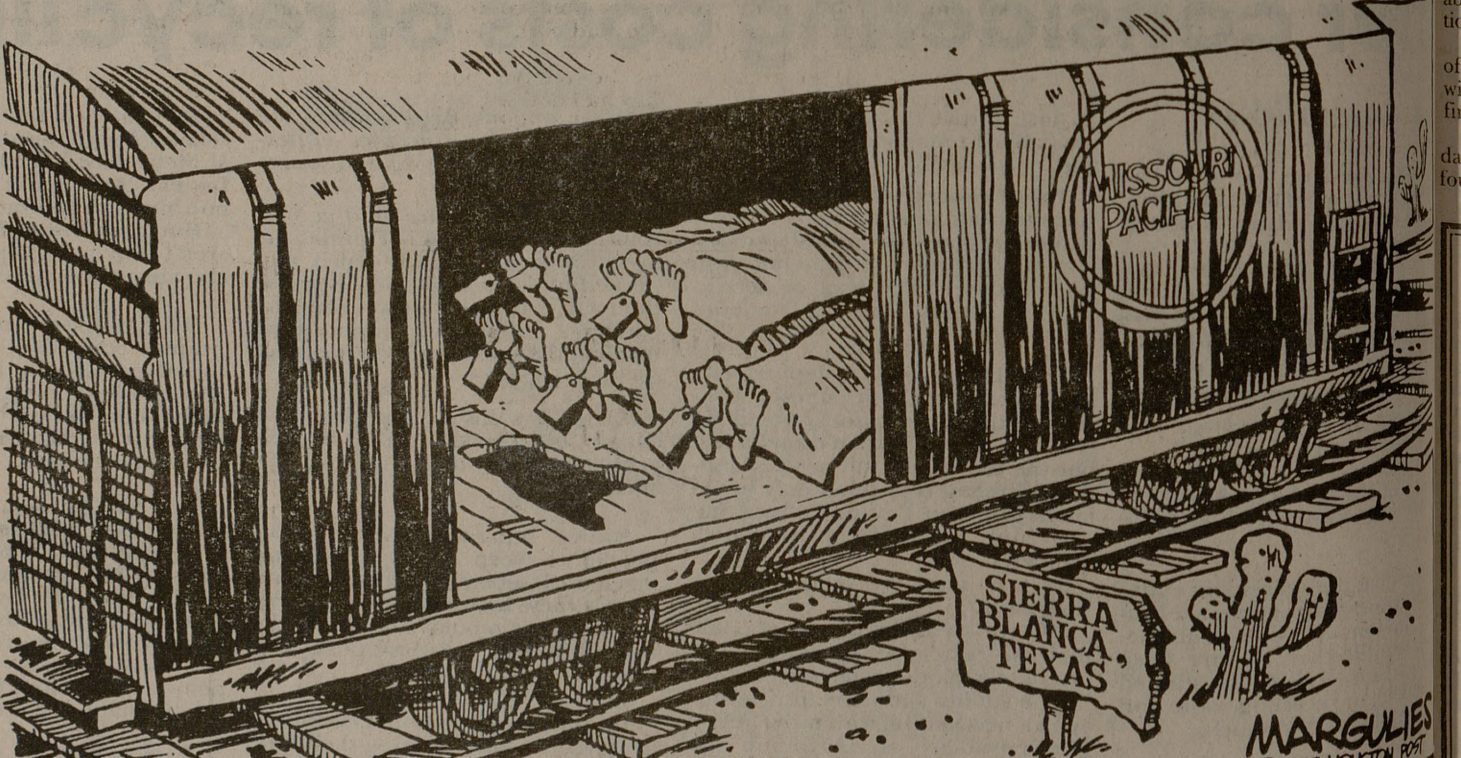
Another one of my favorite foods is barbecue pork. But a lady wrote a book saying eating pork is one of the most dangerous things you can do in regard to your health.

I'm going to miss barbecue pork. I like sitting on a beach drinking beer. We've already been over beer, and too much sun can cause skin cancer. I'll just stay in a motel room and drink carrot juice until I find out there is something wrong with it.

I enjoy sex. It runs in my family. But if I have sex, I might get AIDS and die.

And we won't know what dangers are committing ourselves to at such an alarming

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