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WASHINGTON POST

JUDY MANN

Is This What We Went to War For?

I saw a movie last weekend in which Elizabeth Taylor played a fading movie star who fell in love with Robert Wagner, a charming, wealthy real estate mogul. Unfortunately, he turned out to be broke, married and a drinker.

The moral of that story was that you should get to know as much as you can about someone before you marry them. The same could be said for some of the international partners we've been crawling into bed with.

Remember how Kuwait was portrayed during the buildup to the Persian Gulf War? It was, we were told, one of the more enlightened and progressive countries in the Middle East. Its diplomats, whom we got to know like friends, thanks to extensive television coverage, came across as thoughtful, civilized people. In exquisite contrast to Saddam Hussein, the Mideast's premier bully.

After the war was over, however, we started finding out more about our new best friend. Jack Kelley of USA Today exposed how Kuwaiti society now shuns the Kuwaiti women who were raped by Iraqi soldiers. Those who were raped could not get abortions. Many were suicidal. More recently, we have found out about the hundreds of female domestics from the Third World who have taken refuge in their embassies in Kuwait City after their Kuwaiti employers beat and raped them and then held onto their passports.

Kuwait also is the only country in the world that extends voting privileges to certain citizens, but prohibits all women from voting.

Is this what we went to war for?

Arvonne Fraser, a senior fellow at the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs and director of the International Women's Rights Action Watch, said: "Kuwait is enlightened in the sense [that] they buy fancy cars and all the modern goods. But enlightenment in my terms is in your head. I don't call this enlightenment. I call it degradation of women, and it offends me that my country thinks oil is more important than women."

Fraser noted that the State Department has added a section to its annual report on human rights around the globe documenting violations of the rights of women. But, she added, "Then we don't do much about our information. I think it is a remnant of the Cold War mentality. We don't worry about the

security of women. We worry about the security of the country. But countries are made up of people."

A recent United Nations' publication reported that in a survey of 183 Kuwaiti women, one-third said they had been assaulted and 80 percent said they had friends or relatives who had been.

The publication contained other troubling snapshots of the way women are treated in countries with which we do business. In India, registered cases of women being killed in disputes over their dowries soared from 999 in 1985 to 1,786 in 1987. In Austria, violence against the wives was cited as a contributing factor in 59 percent of 1,500 divorce cases that were reviewed.

Close to home, the U.N. publication noted that in the United States, 3 million to 4 million women are estimated to be the victims of domestic violence each year. And yet we are considered among the most progressive nations in the world in the treatment of women.

In 1979, the U.N. General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. President Carter sent it to the Senate for ratification. It has languished in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee ever since because the Reagan and Bush administrations have not sought its ratification. Meanwhile, 110 other countries have ratified the convention.

Although U.S. ratification of the convention would be largely symbolic, it would enable this country to a member of the expert group that annually reviews reports from other ratifying countries on the progress they are making in eliminating discrimination against women. Without ratification, the United States has credible voice in international arenas to raise convention-based complaints about the treatment of women around the world.

Kuwait, it is worth noting, is another country that has not ratified the convention. Fraser said violence against women is becoming a topic that men and women increasingly are willing to talk about worldwide. "We're going to see some action but we've got to talk a lot more about it," she predicted. Senate approval of the Women's Convention not only would let us join the conversation, but would give U.S. citizens a standard for evaluating the human rights record nations who are seeking our help—before we're forced into a shotgun wedding.

Today's Washington Post

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To RIANE EISLER Billie Heller

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The good news!

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FRIDAY, MAY 23, 1997 E3

WASHINGTON POST

JUDY MANN

The World From a Woman's Perspective

A clear majority of American voters want to reshape American foreign policy so that it addresses the issues of security by encompassing solutions to such problems as poverty, the environment, health care, education and human rights, rather than the security of nations.

An approach that focuses on such matters as trade, military defense and nuclear arms control was favored by only 25 percent of the voters polled in a survey commissioned by the International Women's Health Coalition and released at a conference in Washington on Wednesday. A 89 percent majority wants a foreign policy that concentrates on enhancing the security of people, with 64 percent of women favoring this and 53 percent of men.

Three-quarters of the 1,000 voters polled by Lake Sossin Snell & Associates say it is important to increase the number of women involved in making foreign policy, with 50 percent of them saying women bring a different perspective and can offer new ideas and solutions.

Redefining security to target individuals and families rather than nation-states is an outgrowth of several international conferences held during the 1990s on such issues as the environment, population and development, human rights and the emerging roles of women. Nongovernmental organizations, many run by women, have had an increasingly important role in the outcomes of these conferences and are infusing international relations with approaches that put women at the center of development efforts.

Wednesday's conference was sponsored chiefly by the New York-based International Women's Health Coalition, which played a pivotal role in winning international agreement on progressive reproductive rights and health policies for women at the 1994 U.N. conference in Cairo. Those policies, which underscore the links among family planning, environmental protection, education and women's empowerment, came under assault again from religious conservatives the next year at the U.N. conference on women in Beijing. Out of three battles came the idea of putting a "women's lens" on foreign policy that reflects values women care about, said Joan Dunlop, president of the International Women's Health Coalition. "When we say a women's lens, we are using that as a metaphor for a set of spectacles that I can put on and I can

give them to you and you can look through them. This is not a women's foreign policy. It's a perspective on our foreign policy, looking through the lens of a certain set of values."

Part of the point of the conference, which attracted activists from leading American women's organizations as well as women involved with international relations, was to find ways of inserting these values into the foreign policy conversation. Dunlop said, in particular, that women who had returned from the Beijing conference with a new sense of "what it's like to be a good global citizen" had a strong desire "to strike out at the isolationist rhetoric that is coming out of the Congress and to say we don't think this is the way the U.S. should be."

Undersecretary of State Timothy C. Wirth called the Cairo conference a "transforming experience." What made it happen, he said, "was an understanding of what had to be done from the bottom up. . . . It had a fundamental grass-roots base. It was a women's lens. . . that made it work." And, he said, "we cannot continue to make these changes unless we have a different constituent support in Congress. It happens because women all over the U.S. are walking into their congressman's office."

James D. Wolfensohn, president of the World Bank, spoke forcefully about meeting rural women and finding out that wherever he goes, women's hopes for themselves, their families and their children's futures are the same. He made it clear that he is working hard to change the World Bank from a male-dominated culture into one that understands that women are central to sustainable development and that educating a girl is the best investment that can be made. He urged women to respond to isolationist sentiments not just by talking about our interdependency with other nations on such matters as trade, air pollution and health, but with a larger theme, as well. "We have a sense of moral and social values we care about in our country."

A foreign policy grounded in social equity and moral justice, he said, would be one "we can be proud of."

From the World Bank and the State Department, women heard they are welcome at the table. People such as Wirth and Wolfensohn have tried on the women's lens, and they like the fit. That's a big step forward for new foreign policy that puts human security at the heart of a moral core.

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