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Life in Iraq

As Bryan Bender reported the story in *The Globe* on Friday, June 9, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq, was killed by two 500-pound precision-guided bombs that were launched from several miles away from the house in which the terrorist was staying. Bender reported that “the decision was made to destroy the house, rather than launch a raid, out of fear that he might slip away.” In addition to Zarqawi and his spiritual adviser four other people, “including an unidentified woman and child were also killed.”

A few hours after the killing, the pundits began to debate what impact Zarqawi’s death would have on the future of the insurgency. But there is another question that should be asked: what does it mean when a U.S. bomb kills a child?

Our President describes himself as pro-life. He and his allies disapprove not only of abortion but also of using stem cells from fetal tissue in medical experimentation. They argue that even research that will benefit people in the future should not be aided by the use of an aborted fetus. Life, for them, is too sacred. And yet, as Commander in Chief, he is responsible for dropping bombs that kill children in Iraq.

The numbers of civilians killed in Iraq is in the tens of thousands, and many of them have been children. Some have been killed by the insurgents, some by American bombs. While our precision weaponry is a tremendous advance over the crude carpet

bombings of Germany and Japan in World War Two, and while every effort is made to minimize the toll on civilians, aerial bombing is still so massively and blindly destructive that children are killed. The precision bombs can pinpoint what house to destroy, but they cannot see who is inside. In fact, the day after the Baqubah bombing, Maj. Gen. William Caldwell, the American military spokesman in Baghdad, disputed the report that a child had been in the house. In addition to Zarqawi, the casualties, he said, were two men and three women. In other words, we are not quite certain who we killed.

Was it wrong to drop the bombs on the terrorist? Should American ground forces have stormed the building, and thereby risked their own lives, so that they could shoot only those who were trying to shoot them? Should they have taken the chance that Zarqawi would escape? Shouldn't the terrorists themselves be blamed for deliberately hiding themselves among civilians? They have no objection to killing innocents, and they no doubt count it a success when they lure us into killing their own children. It is an effective recruiting tool.

These are questions that Americans must ask themselves, for as citizens we paid for the 500-pound bombs that destroyed the house in Baqubah and killed all who happened to be inside. We are all responsible. We elected a pro-life President who ordered our troops and airplanes into Iraq.

So what does it mean to be pro-life? Does it make sense to believe a fetus is so intrinsically valuable that it should never be killed, and also to believe that it is acceptable to kill a child in order to kill a terrorist, if in fact this is what happened? Does it make sense for a pro-life President to drop bombs and not quite know who was killed?

In the presidential election of 2004 many Americans voted for George Bush because, as a self-professed Christian opposed to abortion and stem cell research, he was taken to be morally superior to his opponent. Many of these same voters did not count the war in Iraq, where hundreds if not thousands of children have been killed, to be an issue of comparable moral significance. This is baffling.

I'm no pundit, and so I do not know whether the killing of Zarqawi will be the long awaited turning point of this horrible war. If the war does turn our way, then perhaps the child who may have been killed along with the terrorist will be counted as an unwilling martyr who died for the greater good. He or she will be one of those many innocents who simply had to die in order to remove the scourge of terrorism from Iraq. War, especially one waged from the sky, forces even those with the best of intentions to kill children.

I have no answers to the questions I have asked. But I do know this: all Americans who call themselves pro-life, beginning with the President, must ask whether they are being honest with themselves. They duck the issue if they declare that abortion and stem cell research are wrong, and then turn their eyes away from those our bombs are actually killing in Iraq.

Many Americans voted for George Bush in 2004 because they felt safer with him at the helm. They have been willing to let him lead the war in Iraq as he sees fit because they have confidence in him. Perhaps these voters will end up being right, and the war will end in a great, if terribly costly, victory for the forces of democracy. But it is utterly irresponsible not to pay attention to who is actually being killed by our 500-pound

bombs. And to ask: should we, who unlike the terrorists value life, be killing children?

If, in fact, that is what we are doing.