

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 16

BOSTON GLOBE
1 July 1985

The training of terrorists

The murder of 329 passengers on an Air-India flight, 80 of them children, was a horrendous crime. If the victims had been killed individually or in small groups, the crime would be more comprehensible but no less hideous.

One of the two young Sikhs suspected of planting a bomb on the plane attended a school for mercenary soldiers in rural Alabama. He had participated last year in a two-week "survival course" that included training in the use of mines, grenades and bombs.

Three other graduates of this school were among five Sikhs arrested in New Orleans in May in connection with an apparent plot to kill Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi of India during his recent trip to the United States.

The school in Alabama is run by a former Army commando who served in Vietnam. Hundreds of American and foreign "students" have graduated from his course. They have learned how to torture enemies, to booby-trap food, to blow up a building, and to kill in a variety of ways.

No one doubts that there is a market for this kind of training. On every continent fanatics are ready to murder and mutilate as a means of advancing their political or religious ideas.

Many governments are willing to tolerate this training when it serves their immediate political ends. The United States is one of them. President Reagan has defended the right of individuals and groups to finance and staff the revolution against the Sandinista government in Nicaragua.

Two Americans who had been helping the anti-Sandinista rebels were killed last August when their helicopter was shot down over Nicaragua. They were members of Civilian Military Assistance, a private paramilitary group based in Alabama.

At the time, officials of the State and Defense Departments and the Central Intelligence Agency told Congress that it "can be perfectly legal" for private groups to assist foreign military operations. The Reagan administration's position was that it neither encouraged nor discouraged American citizens from engaging in such activities.

How do would-be terrorists and guerrilla fighters learn about training schools such as the one in Alabama? These schools are advertised in several magazines that are devoted to stories about weaponry and paramilitary training. Major defense contractors support such magazines with their advertising.

The United States cannot have it both ways. It cannot deplore hijackers and terrorists while it tolerates "schools" to train them on its own soil.

The techniques being taught are amoral and apolitical. The method used to blow up a Nicaraguan refinery can destroy an American refinery in Angola. The terrorist technique that worked to blow up an Air-India plane last week can be used against an American plane this week. There was nothing unique about the tactics used by the Arab hijackers of TWA Flight 847.

It is time for this country to come clean on the terrorist issue. The Reagan administration should seek an international convention to curb terrorism. It should ask Congress for a law banning paramilitary education not under the direct control of the US armed forces. The president could ask defense contractors as a patriotic duty not to support through their advertising magazines that spread information about terrorist techniques.

These measures would not banish terrorism but they would diminish it, and they would bring to bear the full political and moral weight of this country in behalf of sanity.