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Answering Passion With Violence

In the world of science there is a discipline called "the mathematics of chaos." It deals with how sometimes a little change can have enormous, unpredictable consequences. What is theoretically true in math is certainly true in power politics. The Middle East is a perfect example of that.

In fact, the ultimate example of the non-mathematical application of the theory of chaos is the very establishment of the state of Israel. What once seemed so inconsequential—the introduction of Jewish Europeans into Palestine—has had the most far-reaching consequences. The hijacking of TWA flight 847 is an example of that. It can be traced to the establishment of the first Jewish settlements on the inhospitable dunes of what was later to become Tel Aviv.

More directly and more recently, though, the cause of the hijacking was the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June of 1982. Conceived by Ariel Sharon, the invasion was supposed to be a relatively simple affair. The Israeli army would quickly demolish the Pales-

tine Liberation Organization's army, eliminate it as a military force in Lebanon and as a political force in the occupied West Bank. Then Israel would turn Lebanon over to its ally, the Christian Phalangists, and all would be the Hebrew equivalent of hunky dory.

Anyone with access to a newspaper can tell you almost nothing worked as planned. The PLO was militarily demolished, but the Christians never did get to rule Lebanon. And the Israeli military operation, which was supposed to take no time, is just now ending—and ending as a fiasco. Not only did Israel lose about 600 troops in Lebanon, it created something it and the United States will long have to contend with—the rise of a dynamic Shiite movement.

There is a lesson in all this for the United States. Like Israel before its invasion of Lebanon, there are people in this country who tend to think that anything military is "surgical"—meaning clean, meaning decisive. The object of all this martial ardor is usually Nicaragua, which, we are told, would

take us less time to conquer than it took Israel to slice through Lebanon. It might take just as long, too.

At the moment, though, the call for military action is directed at those presumed to be responsible for the hijacking of TWA Flight 847. Congress, assembled on the early morning television shows, has called in the person of various members for reprisals, forgetting, it seems, that the hijackers said their deed was in reprisal for an earlier Beirut bombing in which the CIA has been indirectly implicated.

A reprisal to the reprisal would only result in even more reprisals, and the United States would find itself a pariah in the Arab world and in the unenviable position of the Israelis—a sitting duck for any terrorist convinced that a bomb in the trunk of the car is a big step on the stairway to paradise.

Consider for a moment what it would mean if the United States became the target of fanatical terrorists. The United States is not a compact little nation like Israel but a

world power—both militarily and commercially. We have military bases overseas, hotels—even soft-drink bottlers. The United States is countless tourists and countless planes. It is lots of ships and lots of banks. It is extended all over the world. Talk is cheap and revenge gratifying, but this would be an exceedingly dirty fight. No one fights clean in the Middle East.

In the end, it is passion—political, religious, ethnic—that makes for the current situation in Lebanon. That passion could be an idealistic nationalism or a frightening hate but it is something we Americans are not familiar with, something we often fail to take into account when formulating policy—or in mouthing off about retaliation. We neglected it in Vietnam just as the Israelis did in Lebanon and the price for both nations was heavy.

What is hard to understand is why both the United States and Israel persist in thinking that violence is an antidote to passion. It's not. It's only a justification for it and a precursor to chaos.