

APPEARED  
PAGE 5 (Part II)

LOS ANGELES TIMES  
28 March 1986

# Who Glorifies Terrorism? We Do

## U.S. Must Become Factual, Balanced—and Quietly Lethal

By ANTHONY H. CORDESMAN

Taken at face value, the United States has just completed a successful military action—entering the Gulf of Sidra without loud posturing, waiting for Libya's Col. Moammar Kadafi to make the first move, and replying with just enough force to show that we retained freedom of the seas.

Unfortunately, America's latest encounter with Kadafi cannot be considered outside its broader historical and political context. From this perspective the United States has been far less successful. The limited encounters in the Gulf of Sidra fell far short of being a convincing demonstration of American strength, and they did not give credibility to President Reagan's overblown rhetoric.

Seen from within the Middle East, the United States is still the nation that lost in Vietnam and "redeployed" from Lebanon. It is the nation that could do nothing to prevent Israel from invading Lebanon, and that could not save the Shah of Iran or later protect its own hostages. It is now the nation that made threat after threat to Kadafi but proved unable to hurt him or to remove him from power.

The Gulf of Sidra incident, then, is a situation where the United States could not benefit from exerting legitimate rights. To most of the Third World the action has done nothing but demonstrate that Kadafi can attack a U.S. fleet and get away with it. It has not discredited the Libyan strongman; it has discredited the United States. He is the mouse that roared, and we are the cat that failed to catch him.

If we are to change this situation in the future, we have to understand the world we live in. The unfortunate reality is that Reagan's rhetoric may play well in Peoria, but it does little more than weaken or embarrass most of our allies.

They feel that the President has done far more to glorify terrorism than to fight it. They feel that he has "spoken stickly and carried a big soft." The terrorists get a maximum of publicity and self-glorification, with very little fear of "martyrdom." In fact, most of our closest friends in the Middle East feel that Reagan has again made Kadafi seem to be the Arab who can challenge the United States without suffering more than the loss of a few ships and a Soviet-supplied surface-to-air missile site.

Arab perceptions are even more negative, and are influenced by much broader policy issues. The United States seems to have stopped any real efforts at bringing peace to the Middle East, and seems to lack any clear policy or strategy for supporting friendly Arab states like Tunisia, Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The Reagan Administration seems to be unable to move its defense and security assistance program for the Middle East through Congress. We make no friends in the Arab world when we cannot both maintain our commitment to preserve the security of Israel and provide military support to Jordan, Saudi Arabia or other conservative Arab states.

Partly through the carelessness of the American media, and partly through the carelessness of the Administration and Congress, the United States also seems to be unable to distinguish between a true terrorist like Kadafi or Abu Nidal and the rest of the Arab world. Terrorism is not just a problem for Americans. Far more people die of terrorism incidents in Lebanon in any given week, and indeed the bulk of all its victims are from the Middle East. American politicians survive even their worst posturing about terrorism; moderate Arab leaders and spokesmen have often given their lives for that moderation.

We also seem to be unable to balance our condemnation of Palestinian terrorism with a demand for human rights for the millions of Arabs who have been under Israeli occupation since 1967. More than half the Arab world is under age 16 and has

lived its entire life during a time in which Israel has occupied Gaza and the West Bank. When America or Israel is attacked, much of the Arab world perceives what we call "terrorism" to be self-defense.

This does not mean that we should tolerate terrorism or abandon Israel. It does mean, however, that we need a far more realistic and professional approach to the problem of both terrorism and dealing with the Middle East.

—First, the President and senior American officials should stop making threats or publicizing the terrorists. When terrorists are publicly attacked, it should be in the form of hard evidence of their involvement provided by U.S. intelligence officers or specialists with real expertise or credibility. The United States should speak

Continued

quietly and carefully, and in a form that few could deny.

—We should attack the roots of terrorism by pressing hard for a peace settlement in the Middle East. It may be years before the United States can bring Israel and its neighbors to the peace table under conditions that both give Israel the security guarantees that it needs and the Arabs in the occupied territories at least some degree of sovereignty. But, meanwhile, Washington should preserve balance in its dealings with the Arabs and Israel and condemn every violation of human rights, whether terrorist or not.

—While the United States should continue to give both military aid and security guarantees to Israel, it should also provide similar aid or arms sales to friendly Arab states. It should not abandon its Arab friends for short-term gains in domestic politics.

—The United States should also support its European allies and Arab states in using police procedures and the rule of law wherever possible. It should focus on creating professional expertise and organization to arrest terrorists or halt them before they can act.

—Finally, the United States should quietly identify the true leaders of terrorist movements that make strikes against Americans. In those few cases in which

terrorists prove able to exist outside the rule of law, the United States should resort to covert action—or, to be blunt, assassinations. Such terrorists should no longer feel safe, count on public glory or hope for some statute of limitations to excuse them from their acts. But only at the proper time and in the proper context should U.S. military force be used.

Granted, these recommendations will please few U.S. politicians who are seeking cheap publicity rather than an end to terrorism. The mix of hard and soft measures will also displease conservative and liberal alike. The fact remains, however, that we can only really fight terrorism if we act responsibly and take full account of the political realities outside the United States. We cannot fight terrorism or even political extremism in the Middle East by remaining part of the problem. We cannot continue to give domestic politics priority. A superpower can remain a superpower only by dealing intelligently with friend and foe alike.

*Anthony H. Cordesman is an adjunct professor at Georgetown University and vice president for Washington operations of the Eaton Analytical Assessments Center.*



KAL, The Observer, London