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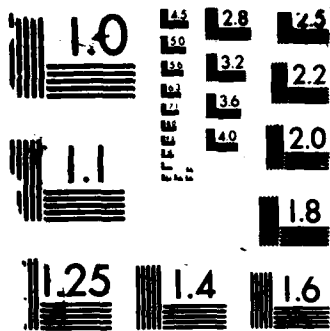
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# STUDENT ESSAY

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COMBATTING TERRORISM --  
A RESPONSE IN KIND

BY  
TOM LUM

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US ARMY WAR COLLEGE, CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA

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ABSTRACT

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➤ Outside of armed conflicts representing nations with forces in uniforms, another kind of war has emerged waged by terrorists. For the past twenty years terrorists have waged war against nations for a variety of reasons. No rules of war govern their conduct nor do they observe any. Methods of combatting terrorism vary from nation to nation. Few nations agree totally on how to combat this form of lawlessness. This essay examines one approach and suggests another. President Reagan's ultimate decision to bomb Libya is examined through a discussion of the events, repercussions of these events, and world opinion of these events that preceded his decision. A harsher, more controlled and personal approach to combatting terrorism is suggested and discussed. *Keywords: military strategy*

*combatting terrorism; thesis*

## COMBATting TERRORISM --

### A RESPONSE IN KIND

On 15 April 1986, dozens of U.S. warplanes carried out a massive bombing raid on airfields, government command posts and suspected terrorist training camps around the Libyan port cities of Tripoli and Benghazi. The attacks were ordered by President Reagan to "preempt and discourage" terrorism.

President Reagan ordered the military operations against Libya after being told of "irrefutable" evidence that Libyan leader Muammar Khaddafi was responsible for the bombing of a West Berlin discotheque.<sup>1</sup>

Was this attack necessary? If so, would it deter Khaddafi-initiated terrorism? Was President Reagan "pushed" too far by Khaddafi and would Reagan's credibility suffer if he did not take action? What other action could Reagan have taken?

Four months earlier, in December 1985, a coordinated terrorist attack at Rome and Vienna airports by Abu Nidal groups killed eighteen people, one an eleven year old American girl. Both the U.S. and Israel accused Libya of supporting the Abu Nidal group, a break-away faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization.<sup>2</sup> In a radio broadcast from Tripoli on December 29, 1985, several days after the attacks,

Libya described the Vienna and Rome airport attacks as "heroic operations." The broadcast had harsh words for Tunis, Egypt and Jordan, who condemned the attacks and strongly opposed such actions.<sup>3</sup>

Senior level officials in all West European nations denounced the terrorist acts. Newspaper headlines and television journalists described in detail the bloody, unprovoked murder by the Abu Nidal group. Italy's Prime Minister, Bettino Craxi, declared that the Italian government would use all means at its disposal to "raise the barrier of defense and prevention, and to intensify actions of repression and struggle against terrorism."<sup>4</sup> Most Europeans were outraged and were calling for justice.

Italy's president, Francesco Cossiga, and Craxi had harsh words to say about what had happened. The president noted that "the outrages both in Rome and Vienna had been perpetrated against two countries which have always been inspired by the principles of freedom and by an understanding of the national causes of people seeking independence." Cossiga praised the Italian security forces and expressed the hope that at long last measures would be adopted on the international level which would be capable of standing up to this wave of terrorism, which was a real threat to peace and international coexistence.<sup>5</sup>

Craxi spoke about the "bloody and suicidal terrorism" and expressed his "feelings of abhorrence." He condemned without any reservation this slaughter of innocent people. In the view of Craxi, closer cooperation between the states in the Mediterranean area was becoming indispensable. "I do not believe," Craxi went on to say, "that these terrorist commandos, who according to first reports are Palestinian terrorists, acted in isolation and are no more than crazy splinter groups. We have to tackle the responsibility of the countries which guarantee their protection and the opportunity for them to arm and organize (emphasis added)."<sup>6</sup> As you can see, Europeans were ready for and almost demanding retaliation.

There were some more cautious voices in Europe. For example, Malta's Prime Minister Carmeo Miloud Bonnici said that Malta would fight terrorism "no matter what the price." However, he added that "a military attack could create another theatre of war in the Mediterranean" and he called on other Mediterranean countries "to stop the United States from committing an act of madness."<sup>7</sup>

In the U.S., the American public shared the outrage and senior U.S. officials demanded action. President Reagan, riding a crest of popularity following the Grenada invasion and the diversion of the Egyptian airliner carrying the "Achille Lauro" hijackers, ordered a trade embargo in Libya,

ordered all Americans working there to leave the country and froze the Libyan government's financial assets in the United States.

Democratic Senator Howard Metzenbaum of Ohio said that "maybe we're at that point in the world where Mr. Khaddafi has to be eliminated."<sup>8</sup> People fear Khaddafi's unpredictability. They fear his stop-at-nothing fanatics who travel the globe shooting Libyan "stray dogs" and any foreigner who angers him. In a survey by polltaker Louis Harris, "large majorities endorsed punitive action against meddlers like Libya; 72 percent of the people surveyed said that countries supporting terrorism should be threatened with invasion, while 79 percent advocated a universal death penalty for terrorists."<sup>9</sup>

Why has Khaddafi risked the wrath of world opinion and the security and safety of his country by encouraging and supporting terrorist activities? In one report "his madness - obsessionalism, megalomania and love of fantasy -" is caused by three chief obsessions. First he hates Israel. Second, he blames the West, especially the United States, for propping up Israel. He "despises godless western materialism, while paradoxically envying western affluence." Lastly, he dreams of "an idyllic Arab unity that would make Arabs a power to be reckoned with."<sup>10</sup>

President Reagan's plan was to give Khaddafi one last chance to "clean up his act" and to clear the way for military action. A CIA report "concluded that there is a zero probability that Khaddafi will abandon his dream of uniting the Arab world under his leadership and of humiliating the United States, and an equally remote chance that he will abandon terrorism as his principal weapon."<sup>11</sup>

In early April 1986, a U.S. Sixth Fleet maneuver was planned off the coast of Libya which included U.S. ships crossing Khaddafi's line of death in the Gulf of Sidra. When Libya fired surface-to-air missiles at American planes, the Sixth Fleet replied with missiles of its own, silencing the air-defense battery. When Libyan patrol boats approached the fleet, bombs and missiles drove them off, sinking at least two.

After the imposition of Reagan's retaliation in January, intelligence reports showed that Khaddafi had stepped up and encouraged further terrorist activities against Americans. Libya-supported hit teams were found and targetted against U.S. diplomats and missions. Khaddafi intensified his efforts to recruit European and Palestinian hit men in hopes of shifting the blame from Libya.<sup>12</sup>

On April 7, 1986, a bomb exploded in a discotheque crowded with U.S. servicemen in West Berlin. Two U.S. servicemen were killed and many wounded. President Reagan

received "indisputable" evidence that Libya was behind the bombing. Reagan ordered a strike on Libya.<sup>13</sup>

Up to this point, before the strike, the U.S. public and West European press had been calling for retaliation and even the death of Khaddafi. After the strike, praise for the action flowed in from all corners of the U.S. Senator Quayle, Indiana, called it "a brave, balanced and bold decision." In the U.S., those in favor of the strike greatly overwhelmed the dissenters. U.S. allies were split over the raid.<sup>14</sup>

West Germany and the British had doubts over the choice of action. Juergen Moellemann, West German Minister of State, called on "the United States and Libya to show moderation." Moellemann said in an interview on German radio that "military actions are unsuitable for combatting terrorism."<sup>15</sup> However, in an address to the Bundestag by Chancellor Helmut Kohl, the Chancellor describes Khaddafi's role in Middle East terrorism and how Khaddafi encouraged, supported, and controlled many acts of international terrorism. Kohl recalled terrorist acts in other regions of the world that could be traced to Libya. He stated that Khaddafi was at odds with almost all his neighbors. Kohl spoke out strongly against terrorists and terrorism. Kohl supported the United States bombing of Libya and emphasized that Europeans must unite in their fight against terrorism

and act jointly to prevent Europe becoming a battleground for terrorists.<sup>16</sup> Ironically, the French public strongly supported the strike even though their government refused to help the U.S.<sup>17</sup>

Feelings in the Middle East were strongly against the United States. The Council of Arab Ambassadors in Washington issued a condemnation of the United States attack on targets inside Libya. The Council "deplores this act of aggression which has resulted in the indiscriminate killing of innocent civilians." They also added that the attack against Libya "constituted a clear violation of the United Nations Charter and international legality and intensifies the utmost fear of tension in the region." They urged the United States to examine the real causes of violence and injustice in the region instead of flexing its muscles against Libya under the cover of combatting international terrorism.<sup>18</sup>

Leaders of several Arab countries and factions expressed their support of Khaddafi. They were very vocal in their support and called for unity within the Arab ranks. They spoke of retaliation against United States interests worldwide. They called for a boycott of U.S. goods, severance of diplomatic relationships with Washington, and the liquidation and nationalization of all U.S. interests within their countries. They were emphatic that the "crimes of the United States" would not go unpunished.<sup>19</sup>

How does one deal with terrorists? Rabbi Meir Kahane, a member of Israeli parliament recommends that we "never, ever deal with terrorists. Hunt them down and, more important, mercilessly punish those states and groups that fund, arm, support, or simply allow their territories to be used by the terrorists."

Terrorists fear retaliation or military intervention. Many incidents have shown their fear of retaliation and harm. In the hijacking of both the TWA airliner out of Athens last summer and the cruise ship "Achille Lauro" last fall, a principal reason that the terrorists released their hostages was their belief in imminent intervention -- retaliation afterward in the case of the airliner and military rescue of the "Achille Lauro" (both American and Italian forces were poised to storm the ship on the day the pirates surrendered). In his book Terrorism: How the West Can Win, Benjamin Netanyahu states, "Terrorists have often escaped retaliation because of the sloppiness of the West's thinking about the use of force. America's loss of clarity in the wake of Vietnam has become a general Western malaise. The rules of engagement have become so rigid that governments often strait-jacket themselves in the face of unambiguous aggression. But a fundamental principle must be recognized: under no circumstances should a government categorically rule out a military response simply because of the risk of

civilian casualties. There is a practical and moral basis for this position. In practical terms, an inflexible rule against risking civilian casualties would make any military action virtually impossible. In moral terms, an absolute prohibition on civilian casualties today condemns to death or injury many future victims. Terrorism, undeterred, will inevitably increase."<sup>20</sup>

The British journal, The Economist, feels "there is no moral objection to meeting force with force." It believes "Americans should not rule out the possibility of military action when Libyans are once again caught somewhere with a smoking gun: and those of America's allies that have the right sort of military power - notably Britain, France, and West Germany - should be ready to help." While urging anti-terrorist actions, it states that "the military option is difficult to put into practice with the necessary precision. The Pentagon has studied a range of tactics, from assassination of Colonel Khaddafi through exemplary assaults against terror-training camps to air raids and bombardment from the sea. None of them, so far, has quite fitted the bill. There is too high a risk of failure. Too many civilians might be killed. The Europeans would be shocked by the use of American muscle, especially if it were clumsily applied."<sup>21</sup>

In September 1986, Israel's Minister of Trade and Industry, Ariel Sharon, said, "An intelligence and command center must be established, where information will be gathered on all terrorist organizations, their leaders, movements, bases and headquarters. Such a center would issue warnings on operations in process. It would also undertake preliminary planning of military strikes against terrorist targets -- strikes like the Israeli raid on the P.L.O. headquarters in Tunisia a year ago and the American raid on Libya.

"At present, the main problem is that the terrorist organizations have a monopoly on surprise, whether in choosing their targets, in timing or in the scope of their operations. Generally, by the time a special force can be deployed, it is too late: innocent victims have been slaughtered. A center to coordinate anti-terrorist operations would not only expedite actions to free hostages, but it would also make preemptive attacks on terror bases and headquarters possible.

"The terrorists, and especially their commanders, must be eliminated. Such operations must be prepared well in advance, and for this a constant operational coordination between members of the alliance is essential. It is now time for the West to take its own measures against terrorism. If countries like the United States, Britain, West Germany and

France take the lead in fighting terrorism, I am convinced the cost and damage of terror can be quickly reduced and terrorism itself ultimately eliminated. But first we need a decision." <sup>22</sup>

President Reagan made a decision and the decision seemed to be a good one. It was one that the terrorists seemed to have understood. A year has passed and there has not been a single known act of Libyan sponsored terrorism against U.S. personnel abroad or at home. The Economist states, "Too many innocent people have been victims of Libyan violence. Mr. Reagan was right to call a halt." Whenever a villain appears in history, fashionable fainthearts will always argue that that particular dictator is merely an inevitable manifestation of social disorder. "Understand, they say, the 'underlying' causes of the 'problem'; Khaddafi exists inevitably: If he were removed, the alternative would be no better. This is nonsense. Libya less Khaddafi would be a much less dangerous place for the rest of the world. If there is to be any chance of making it so, getting rid of Khaddafi is the first step." <sup>23</sup>

Have we seen the end of Libyan terrorism? I do not think so. Most terrorists will continue their terrorist activities to call attention to themselves and their causes. To stop terrorism we must go a step further; we must stop the terrorists themselves as Mr. Sharon has advocated. Not only

must we be able to take casualties but we should initiate a covert action program against the terrorists and control media coverage of their activities.

This can be accomplished by treating terrorists with a set of rules that they understand and respect -- their own rules. They have hidden behind and used western laws to their advantage for years. They have been arrested, deterred, questioned and often set free to commit other terrorist acts. This has to stop.

The following scenario is a possible course of action to stop the terrorists themselves and thus reduce or eliminate their acts of violence. An agreement among cooperating nations would require that known or suspected terrorists traveling into or through their airports be detained and placed in custody without public acknowledgment of the detention. Only a select few law enforcement officials would be aware of who had been detained and where they were being held. The detainees would be held incommunicado. They would be held in areas away from other prisoners and not accessible to non-cleared personnel.

Many terrorist groups or factions have demonstrated a close comradeship. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that when one of the group fails to return or report in a reasonable time, a search to determine the whereabouts of the missing comrade will ensue. If terrorist groups know that

one of their members has been arrested, they often commit other crimes or hold hostages to free their jailed comrades. We have seen this done repeatedly. If they were not aware that one of their members has been arrested, they would have no reason to commit crimes in an effort to free them. Good intelligence and airport and border surveillance could produce more detainees from factions searching for their missing members. Detained members from the same faction or a friendly faction could be held in the same areas. Listening devices could be installed in these areas so that conversations among the terrorists could be monitored for additional information on their organizations.

Once the incarcerated terrorists realize that no one knows or cares what has happened to them and that they will not be martyrs even if they die, they will be more willing to cooperate. In an effort to gain their freedom or as a concession to communicate with friends and/or relatives, the incarcerated terrorists might be willing to provide information about their particular groups. Those terrorists that provide accurate information on other members of their group and how their group is financed and armed could possibly be released under the condition that they not reveal the method of incarceration that was used. A leverage, if they do reveal our method of arrest, would be our publicizing that they "fingered" other terrorists or provided important

information thereby endangering the lives of others. The terrorist's debriefing session would be video-taped or filmed. The filming would show no physical harm done to the terrorist to allow us to disclaim torture or coercion. The terrorist would be shown speaking of his own free will. A hidden camera could be used if he is camera shy. The film would then be edited to our advantage to depict a pleasing and cooperative terrorist. Prior to the release of the terrorist, he would be shown the tape or film to further strengthen his cooperation.

When the released terrorist joins his friends or family, he may or may not choose to rejoin his old organization. If he does, a reasonable amount of time should be allowed for him to reestablish himself. He should then be contacted to provide additional information on his organization. A leverage would be the film that we are holding.

The "mysterious disappearance" of a number of terrorists from different organizations would make those that remained in their safehavens wary of the unknown and perhaps deter them from further activities. This method of incarceration would not make newspaper headlines or television news flashes, media that terrorists thrive on.

This method of fighting terrorism seems harsh, but to combat terrorists who have no respect for western laws, we cannot confine ourselves to our rules of law enforcement.

Terrorists should not be allowed to exploit their causes while hiding within our laws and ethics. Since they neither respect nor obey our laws, they do not deserve the protection these laws provide.

The terrorist challenge must be answered by diplomatic, economic and military means. Our confusion and vacillation aids in the rise of terrorism. The challenge must be met with clarity, courage and calmness. To quote a popular deodorant advertisement, "Never let them see you sweat."

## ENDNOTES

1. Bernard Weintraub, "American Bombers Strike Bases in Libya," New York Times, 15 April 1986, p. 1.
2. George C. Wilson, "U.S. Warplanes Bomb Targets in Libya in Attempt to Deter Qaddafi Terrorism," Washington Post, 15 April 1986, p. 1.
3. "Vienna, Rome Airport Attacks 'Heroic Operations'," Daily Report Western Europe, 31 December 1985, p. Q1.
4. "Reaction to Airport Terrorist Attacks Reported," Daily Report Western Europe, 30 December 1985, p. L4.
5. Ibid.
6. "Craxi Denounces Terrorist Sympathizers," Daily Report Western Europe, 16 April 1986, p. L2.
7. "Prime Minister on Military Action Against Libya," Daily Report Western Europe, 7 January 1986, p. U1.
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10. "Don't Just Stand There," The Economist, 11 January 1986, pp. 11-12.
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19. "Inter-Arab Affairs," Daily Report Middle East and Africa, 17 April 1986, pp. A1-A3.

20. Benjamin Netanyahu, Terrorism: How the West Can Win, pp. 204-205.

21. Economist, pp. 11-12.

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