

MILITARY FORCE MAY NOT BE RULED OUT

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June 1985

P-7103

The Rand Paper Series

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For months, five Americans have been hostages of Islamic Jihad in Lebanon, and are threatened with death. We believe that Islamic Jihad may be composed of extremist Shi'ites belonging to an organization called Hizbollah.

Earlier this week it was reported that the CIA may have been indirectly involved in a car bombing aimed at killing Hizbollah's leader. The leader was not harmed, but 80 people were killed and 200 were injured. According to the report, Americans neither knew of the attack beforehand nor approved the attack, which was carried out by local operatives secretly hired by other locals who had received U.S. assistance.

These events raise anew the issue of how the United States should respond to terrorism. Are we powerless to do anything more than further fortify our embassies and warn all U.S. citizens that they depart our shores at their own peril? Is the only alternative to sink down to the dirty war waged by our terrorist opponents, hire our own crew of assassins, match them car bomb for car bomb? I think not. There are other courses of action consistent with American interests and values, including the use of force.

In combating terrorism abroad, the United States faces a twofold problem. On the one hand, it confronts what, unfortunately, has by now become "ordinary" terrorism. This is a diverse threat. All sorts of terrorist groups have attacked U.S. targets in 72 countries since 1968. Dealing with this type of terrorism is the responsibility of the local government. The U.S. response has been, and should remain, primarily defensive.

¹This paper was originally presented as an article in the Op-Ed section of the *Los Angeles Times* published May 21, 1985.

State-sponsored terrorism poses a different problem. Here the United States confronts a campaign of terrorism instigated and directed by a handful of state sponsors, concentrated now in the Middle East, but which would include others in the future. Its violence is deadlier and can have much greater impact on U.S. policy, as in the case of the bombing of the American Marines in Beirut. Here, defensive measures may not be enough.

We should not dismiss economic and diplomatic sanctions too readily. True, verbal denunciations and shutting down embassies seem to have little effect on governments that combine revolutionary zeal, religious righteousness and political ruthlessness. And in today's economically interdependent world, economic sanctions seldom work (if they can be applied at all). The country imposing them often ends up paying more than the target country. But we haven't given them much of a trial.

American corporations still do business as usual with Libya and Iran. Despite several warnings by the President, substantial numbers of Americans still reside and work in Libya. They say they feel secure there--it is others who are targets of Libyan hit teams. We have not strongly pressured our allies to reduce their business dealings with countries that sponsor terrorism.

We could clamp down more. The administration could lay out the evidence against a state sponsor of terrorism before the Congress and the American people, and seek a resolution authorizing actions consistent with belligerent status, including the use of force. (If we don't have the evidence, we may want to drop the tough talk.) Such a resolution would not oblige us to use force, nor would it necessarily eliminate the element of surprise if we did use it. If and when and how we would apply force would remain our choice.

What would this accomplish? It would warn Americans and other foreign nationals to get out of the way. It would discourage foreign investment in the culprit country. Insurance costs rising to wartime rates would inhibit that country's trade. It would compel our adversary to disperse or increase defenses around vital targets. Without a shot being fired by us, it would impose great costs on him. And it would justify the use of force if we deemed it necessary.

If we do consider using military force, we must be clear--and realistic--about our objectives. It would be very difficult in any case to cripple the terrorists' or their state sponsors' capabilities to persist with their campaigns. Terrorist operations require only a handful of people recruited from a large reservoir, and it doesn't take much logistical infrastructure to mount an assassination or a bombing.

Can the United States persuade the state sponsors to desist? Given the nature of the the leadership we confront, that is problematical. But if persuasion is dubious, doing nothing at all is useless.

Secretary of State Shultz has voiced his concern that if we impose no cost on the current state sponsors of terrorism, other governments will be emboldened to adopt similar tactics. Since we are particularly vulnerable to this kind of warfare, we must try to keep it from spreading. Can we do it by demonstrating to hostile governments that sponsoring terrorism will bring military reprisal down on their heads? Possibly.

Can the United States demonstrate, for whatever it is worth in international diplomacy, that we are not impotent? Probably.

Can the U.S. government satisfy that sector of American public opinion demanding that we do something? Certainly, but by itself, that is not a sufficient reason to launch a military action.

One thing should be clear: Military force will not end terrorist attacks against us. Indeed, it may inspire terrorist retaliation.

But, if the United States decides to use military force in response to state-sponsored terrorism, whom does it hit? The advantage of operations against terrorists themselves is the direct connection: they attack you, you attack them. That makes it easy to justify. The disadvantages are the paucity of lucrative targets and the risk of civilian casualties.

Military operations against state sponsors present different advantages and disadvantages. On the plus side, states offer a richer assortment of vulnerable targets; in attacking such targets, it might be easier to avoid civilian casualties; and attacks on important targets can inflict costs that are more likely to affect decisionmaking. On the minus side, we must be sure we can offer some solid proof of connection

between the terrorist perpetrator and the state sponsor; attacking a state involves greater political liabilities. And there is the risk of escalation.

Military options are never *attractive*. Justified or not, military action comes down to shooting people and destroying things and we should resort to it only for compelling reasons. We may decide that we simply can no longer tolerate threats, intimidation, and the murder of our civilians; but we may decide that military force is too risky, too costly, and too doubtful of success. If so, we may decide to tolerate terrorist attacks as something we can live with a bit longer, and hope that things will change for the better. These are difficult choices, but choose we can. We are not powerless.

The difficulties in applying military force make covert action look all the more attractive. In my view, however, although covert operations may be necessary under extraordinary circumstances, if the United States is obliged to use force in response to terrorism, it ought to do so with the legitimately constituted armed forces of this country, openly, with an unambiguous message as to who is responsible and why we are doing it. There are moral considerations for doing so; there are legal restraints; and there are practical reasons.

It is simply not to our advantage to enter a contest uneasily, hesitantly, ambivalently, giving our opponent all the advantages. We are vulnerable to attack, while he remains difficult to locate and identify. We will debate each action, while he will not hesitate. We will worry about harming innocent bystanders; he will not hesitate to attack civilian targets. And finally, if our long-range goal is to dissuade other countries from adopting terrorist tactics as a mode of surrogate warfare, we will not promote that goal by blurring the distinction between legitimate armed conflict and international terrorism.

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