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International Terrorism: Image and Reality

Noam Chomsky

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Elementary facts cannot be perceived and obvious thoughts are unthinkable. Simple truths, when expressed, elicit disbelief, horror, and outrage — at the fact that they are voiced.

In a moral and intellectual climate such as this, it may well be appropriate for the world's greatest newspaper to select Ariel Sharon as our tutor on the evils of terrorism and how to combat it.

upon long experience, was straightforward: “The terrorists, and especially their commanders, must be eliminated.” He gave three examples of successful counterterrorist actions: the US bombing of Libya, the Israeli bombing of Tunis, and Israel’s invasion of Lebanon. He recommends more of the same “if the civilized world is to prevail.” The *Times* editors gave his article the title: “It’s Past Time to Crush The Terrorist Monster,” and they highlighted the words: “Stop the slaughter of innocents.” They identify the author solely as “Israel’s Minister of Trade and Industry.” His name is Ariel Sharon.⁴⁷ His terrorist career, dating back to the early 1950s, includes the slaughter of 69 villagers in Qibya and 20 at the al-Bureig refugee camp in 1953; terrorist operations in the Gaza region and northeastern Sinai in the early 1970s including the expulsion of some ten thousand farmers into the desert, their homes bulldozed and farmlands destroyed in preparation for Jewish settlement; the invasion of Lebanon undertaken in an effort — as now widely conceded — to overcome the threat of PLO diplomacy; the subsequent massacre at Sabra and Shatilla; and others.

Some might feel that the choice of Ariel Sharon to provide “the civilized world” with lessons on how to “stop the slaughter of innocents” may be a little odd, perhaps perverse, possibly even hypocritical. But that is not so clear. The choice is not inconsistent with the values expressed in action and the intellectual culture expressed in words — or in silence.

In support of this conclusion, we may observe that the remedy for international terrorism — at least, a substantial component of it — is within our grasp. But no action is taken to this end, and indeed the matter is never discussed and is even inconceivable in respectable circles. Rather, one finds accolades to our benevolent intentions and nobility of purpose, our elevated “standards of democracy, freedom and humanism,” sometimes flawed in performance.

⁴⁷ *New York Times* (September 30, 1986).

There are two ways to approach the study of terrorism. One may adopt a *literal approach*, taking the topic seriously, or a *propagandistic approach*, construing the concept of terrorism as a weapon to be exploited in the service of some system of power. In each case it is clear how to proceed. Pursuing the literal approach, we begin by determining what constitutes terrorism. We then seek instances of the phenomenon — concentrating on the major examples, if we are serious — and try to determine causes and remedies. The propagandistic approach dictates a different course. We begin with the thesis that terrorism is the responsibility of some officially designated enemy. We then designate terrorist acts as “terrorist” just in the cases where they can be attributed (whether plausibly or not) to the required source; otherwise they are to be ignored, suppressed, or termed “retaliation” or “self-defence.”

It comes as no surprise that the propagandistic approach is adopted by governments generally, and by their instruments in totalitarian states. More interesting is the fact that the same is largely true of the media and scholarship in the Western industrial democracies, as has been documented in extensive detail.¹ “We must recognize,” Michael Stohl observes, “that by convention — and it must be emphasized *only* by convention — great power use and the threat of the use of force is normally described as coercive diplomacy and not as a form of terrorism,” though it commonly involves “the threat and often the use of violence for what would be described as terroristic purposes were it not great powers who

¹ Among other sources, see Edward S. Herman, *The Real Terror Network* (South End Press, 1982); Herman and Frank Brodhead, *The Rise and Fall of the Bulgarian Connection* (Sheridan Square Publications, 1986); Noam Chomsky, *Pirates and Emperors* (Claremont, 1986; Amana, 1988); Alexander George, “The Discipline of Terrorology,” this volume. Also the discussion of Walter Laqueur’s *The Age of Terrorism* (Little, Brown and Co., 1987), in Noam Chomsky, *Necessary Illusions* (South End, 1989, pp. 278ff). See this book for references, where not cited here.

were pursuing the very same tactic.”² Only one qualification must be added: the term “great powers” must be restricted to favored states; in the Western conventions under discussion, the Soviet Union is granted no such rhetorical license, and indeed can be charged and convicted on the flimsiest of evidence.

Terrorism became a major public issue in the 1980s. The Reagan administration took office announcing its dedication to stamping out what the [jellybean-munching] president called “the evil scourge of terrorism,” a plague spread by “depraved opponents of civilization itself” in “a return to barbarism in the modern age” (Secretary of State George Shultz). The campaign focused on a particularly virulent form of the plague: state-directed international terrorism. The central thesis attributed responsibility to a Soviet-based “worldwide terror network aimed at the destabilization of Western democratic society,” in the words of Claire Sterling, whose highly-praised book *The Terror Network* became the Bible of the administration and the founding document of the new discipline of terrorology. It was taken to have provided “ample evidence” that terrorism occurs “almost exclusively in democratic or relatively democratic societies” (Walter Laqueur), leaving little doubt about the origins of the plague. The book was soon exposed as a worthless propaganda tract, but the thesis remained intact, dominating mainstream reporting, commentary, and scholarship.

By the mid-1980s, concern over international terrorism reached the level of virtual frenzy. Middle-East/Mediterranean terrorism was selected by editors as the lead story of 1985 in an AP poll, and

² “States, Terrorism and State Terrorism,” in Robert O. Slater and Michael Stohl, *Current Perspectives on International Terrorism* (Macmillan, 1988). Stohl concludes that “In terms of terrorist coercive diplomacy the USA has...been far more active in the Third World than has the Soviet Union.” Other studies show a similar pattern. In her review of military conflicts since World War II, Ruth Sivard finds that 95 percent have been in the Third World, in most cases involving foreign forces, with “western powers accounting for 79 percent of the interventions, communist for 6 percent”; *World Military and Social Expenditures 1981* (World Priorities, 1981), p. 8

8. From Literalism to Doctrinal Necessity

This review of state-directed international terrorism suffers from a serious flaw: it has adhered to naive literalism and is thus irrelevant to contemporary debate over the plague of the modern age.

The review is, furthermore, very far from comprehensive. It barely scratches the surface even for Central America and the Middle East, and the plague is by no means limited to these regions. But it does suffice to raise a few questions. One stands out particularly: how is it possible for scholars and the media to maintain the thesis that the plague of the modern age is traceable to the Soviet-based “worldwide terror network aimed at the destabilization of Western democratic society?” How is it possible to identify Iran, Libya, the PLO, Cuba, and other official enemies as the leading practitioners of international terrorism?

The answers are not difficult to find. We must simply abandon the literal approach and recognize that terrorist acts fall within the canon only when conducted by official enemies. When the US and its clients are the agents, they are acts of retaliation and self-defense in the service of democracy and human rights. Then all becomes clear.

Turning finally to possible remedies for the plague, the standard literature offers some proposals. Walter Laqueur urges that “the obvious way to retaliate” against international terrorism “is, of course, to pay the sponsors back in their own coin,” though such legitimate response may be difficult for Western societies, which fail to comprehend that others do not share their “standards of democracy, freedom and humanism.” Before those afflicted with incurable literalism draw the wrong conclusions, however, it should be stressed that legitimate response does not include bombs in Washington and Tel Aviv, given the careful way in which the concept of terrorism has been crafted.

The *New York Times* called upon an expert on terrorism to offer his thoughts on how to counter the plague. His advice, based

large numbers of people kidnapped, over 100 kept in Israeli prisons without trial, and many killed, some by Israeli gunners while they tried to stay afloat after their ship was sunk, according to survivors interviewed in prison. These Israeli terrorist operations are sometimes marginally noted. Thus after a prisoner exchange in 1983, the *New York Times* observed in paragraph 18 of a front page story that 37 of the Arab prisoners, who had been held at the notorious Ansar torture chamber in southern Lebanon, “had been seized recently by the Israeli Navy as they tried to make their way from Cyprus to Tripoli,” north of Beirut. In 1989, the *Washington Post* ran a story on the release of Palestinian prisoners held under administrative detention, many “at the controversial Negev tent city prison of Ketziot,” another torture chamber. The story mentioned incidentally that “Meanwhile, before dawn, the Israeli navy stopped a boat sailing from Lebanon to Cyprus and seized 14 people described as suspected terrorists,” taking them to Israel for “interrogation.” The Israeli peace organization Dai l’Kibbush reports that in 1986–7, Israeli military courts convicted dozens of people kidnapped at sea or in Lebanon of “membership in a forbidden organization” but no anti-Israel activity or plans; the Palestinians kidnapped allegedly belonged to the PLO, and the Lebanese to Hizballah and in at least one case to the major Shi’ite organization Amal, all legal in Lebanon.⁴⁶ By the same logic, British occupying forces could have sent agents to kidnap Zionists in the United States or on the high seas in 1947, placing them in prison camps without charge or convicting them of support for terrorism. These Israeli operations are little discussed and do not fall within the canon.

The concepts of terrorism and retaliation are supple instruments, readily adapted to the needs of the moment.

⁴⁶ See *Pirates and Emperors*, pp. 51f., 87f.; note 35 above; Linda Gradstein, *Washington Post* (April 6, 1989); “Political Trials,” Dai l’Kibbush, Jerusalem, August 1988, published in *News from Within* (December 14, 1988).

a year later the tourism industry in Europe was badly hit as Americans stayed away in fear of Arab terrorists infesting European cities. The plague then subsided, the monster having been tamed by the cool courage of the cowboy, according to the approved version.

Shifting to the literal approach, we first define the concept of terrorism, and then investigate its application, letting the chips fall where they may. Let us see where this course takes.

1. The Concept of Terrorism

Concepts of political discourse are hardly models of clarity, but there is general agreement as to what constitutes terrorism. As a point of departure we may take the official United States Code:

“act of terrorism” means an activity that — (A) involves a violent act or an act dangerous to human life that is a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or any State, or that would be a criminal violation if committed within the jurisdiction of the United States or of any State; and (B) appears to be intended (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by assassination or kidnapping.³

The concept is not precisely delimited. First, the boundary between international terrorism and aggression is not always clear. On this matter, let us give the benefit of the doubt to the United States and its clients: if they reject the charge of aggression in the

³ United States Code Congressional and Administrative News, 98th Congress, Second Session, 1984, Oct. 19, volume 2; par. 3077, 98 STAT. 2707 (West Publishing Co., 1984).

case of some act of international violence, we will take it to fall under the lesser crime of terrorism. There is also disagreement over the distinction between terrorism and retaliation or legitimate resistance, to which we return.

US sources also provide more succinct definitions of “terrorism.” A US Army manual on countering terrorism defines it as “the calculated use of violence or threat of violence to attain goals that are political, religious or ideological in nature. This is done through intimidation, coercion, or instilling fear.” Still simpler is the characterization in a Pentagon-commissioned study by noted terrorologist Robert Kupperman, which speaks of the threat or use of force “to achieve political objectives without the full-scale commitment of resources.”⁴

Kupperman, however, is not discussing terrorism, rather, low intensity conflict (LIC), a central doctrine of the Reagan administration. Note that as the description indicates and actual practice confirms, LIC — much like its predecessor “counterinsurgency” — is hardly more than a euphemism for state-directed international terrorism, that is, reliance on force that does not reach the level of the war crime of aggression.

The point is recognized within the scholarly discipline, though with the usual doctrinal twist. One leading Israeli specialist observes that “state-sponsored terrorism is a form of low-intensity conflict that states undertake when they find it convenient to engage in ‘war’ without being held accountable for their actions” (Professor Yonah Alexander).⁵ Alexander restricts his attention to the Kremlin conspiracy to destabilize the West with “surrogate groups,” offering such examples as “an extensive PLO training programme...

⁴ *US Army Operational Concept for Terrorism Counteraction* (TRADOC Pamphlet No. 525-37, 1984); Robert Kupperman Associates, *Low Intensity Conflict*, July 30, 1983. Both cited in Michael Klare and Peter Kornbluh (eds), *Low Intensity Warfare* (Pantheon, 1988), pp. 69, 147. The actual quotation from Kupperman refers specifically to “the threat of force;” its use is also plainly intended.

⁵ *Jerusalem Post* (August 4, 1988).

To illustrate, consider the hijacking of the *Achille Lauro* and the murder of Leon Klinghoffer in 1985, doubtless a vile terrorist act. The hijackers, however, regarded their action not as terror but as retaliation for the Israeli bombing of Tunis a week earlier, killing 20 Tunisians and 55 Palestinians with smart bombs that tore people to shreds beyond recognition, among other horrors described by Israeli journalist Amnon Kapeliouk on the scene. Washington cooperated by refusing to warn its ally Tunisia that the bombers were on their way, and George Shultz telephoned Israeli Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir to inform him that the US administration “had considerable sympathy for the Israeli action,” the press reported.⁴⁴ Shultz drew back from this open approval when the UN Security Council unanimously denounced the bombing as an “act of armed aggression” (the US abstaining). Prime Minister Shimon Peres was welcomed to Washington a few days later, while the press solemnly discussed his consultations with President Reagan on “the evil scourge of terrorism” and what can be done to counter it.

For the US and Israel, the Tunis bombing was not terror or aggression but rather legitimate retaliation for the cold blooded murder of three Israelis in Larnaca, Cyprus. Secretary Shultz termed the Tunis bombing “a legitimate response” to “terrorist attacks,” evoking general approbation.⁴⁵ The Larnaca killers, as Israel conceded, had probable connections to Syria but none to Tunis, which was selected as a target because it was defenseless; the Reagan administration selected Libyan cities as a bombing target a few months later in part for the same reason.

The perpetrators of the Larnaca atrocity, in turn, regarded their act not as terrorism but as retaliation. It was, they claimed, a response to Israeli hijackings in international waters for many years, including civilian ferries travelling from Cyprus to Lebanon, with

⁴⁴ Bernard Gwertzman, *New York Times* (October 7, 1985).

⁴⁵ Bernard Gwertzman, *New York Times* (October 2, 1985).

running the risk of being killed while operating against the IDF,” which must “maintain order and security” despite “the price the inhabitants will have to pay.”⁴²

A similar concept of terrorism is widely used by US officials and commentators. The press reports that Secretary of State Shultz’s concern over international terrorism became “his passion” after the suicide bombing of US Marines in Lebanon in October 1983, troops that much of the population saw as a military force sent in to impose the “New Order” established by the Israeli aggression: the rule of right-wing Christians and selected Muslim elites. The media did not call upon witnesses from Nicaragua, Angola, Lebanon and the occupied territories, and elsewhere, to testify to Shultz’s “passion,” either then, or when they renewed their praise for his “visceral contempt for terrorism” and “personal crusade” against it in explaining his refusal to admit Arafat to speak at the United Nations.⁴³

Doubtless Syria too regards the Lebanese who resist its bloody rule as “terrorist,” but such a claim would evoke the ridicule and contempt it merits. The reaction changes with the cast of characters.

7. Terror and Retaliation

The concept of retaliation is a useful device of ideological warfare. Throughout a cycle of violent interaction, each side typically perceives its own acts as retaliation for the terrorism of the adversary. In the Middle East, the Israeli-Arab conflict provides many examples. Israel being a client state, US practice adopts the Israeli conventions.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 63f.

⁴³ Don Oberdorfer, “The Mind of George Shultz,” *Washington Post Weekly* (February 17, 1986); *New York Times* (November 28, 1988).

provided for Nicaragua.” In this conception, “the PLO, which maintains a special relationship with Moscow,” serves its Soviet master by passing on the “specialized training” in terrorism it acquires in the Soviet Union to Nicaragua, which is therefore able to conduct LIC against the United States and its interests. He also suggests ways in which “the Eastern Bloc’s sincerity must be tested;” for example, “Showing willingness to stop propaganda campaigns linking the US and its allies to terrorism.”

As the examples illustrate, it would take a fertile imagination to conjure up a thought so outlandish as to ruffle the composure of the fraternity, as long as doctrinal purity is preserved.

2. Terrorism and the Political Culture

There are many terrorist states in the world, but the United States is unusual in that it is *officially* committed to international terrorism, and on a scale that puts its rivals to shame. Thus Iran is surely a terrorist state, as Western governments and media rightly proclaim. Its major known contribution to international terrorism was revealed during the Iran-Contra inquiries: namely, Iran’s perhaps inadvertent involvement in the US proxy war against Nicaragua. This fact is unacceptable, therefore unnoticed, though the Iranian connection in US-directed international terrorism was exposed at a time of impassioned denunciation of Iranian terrorism.

The same inquiries revealed that under the Reagan Doctrine, the US had forged new paths in international terrorism. Some states employ individual terrorists and criminals to carry out violent acts abroad. But in the Reagan years, the US went further, not only constructing a semi-private international terrorist network but also an array of client and mercenary *states* — Taiwan, South Korea, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and others — to finance and implement its terrorist operations. This advance in international terrorism was revealed

during the period of maximal anguish over the plague, but did not enter into the discussion and debate.

The US commitment to international terrorism reaches to fine detail. Thus the proxy forces attacking Nicaragua were directed by their CIA and Pentagon commanders to attack “soft targets,” that is, barely defended civilian targets. The State Department specifically authorized attacks on agricultural cooperatives — exactly what we denounce with horror when the agent is Abu Nidal. Media doves expressed thoughtful approval of this stand. *New Republic* editor Michael Kinsley, at the liberal extreme of mainstream commentary, argued that we should not be too quick to dismiss State Department justifications for terrorist attacks on farming cooperatives: a “sensible policy” must “meet the test of cost-benefit analysis,” an analysis of “the amount of blood and misery that will be poured in, and the likelihood that democracy will emerge at the other end.” It is understood that US elites have the right to conduct the analysis and pursue the project if it passes their tests.⁶

When a Contra supply plane was shot down in October 1986 with an American mercenary on board, it became impossible to suppress the evidence of illegal CIA supply flights to the proxy forces. The Iran-Contra hearings ensued, focusing much attention on these topics. A few days after they ended, the Central American presidents signed the Esquipulas II peace agreement. The US undertook at once to subvert it.

The agreement identified one factor as “an indispensable element to achieving a stable and lasting peace in the region,” namely termination of any form of aid “to irregular forces or insurgent movements” on the part of “regional or extraregional” governments. In response, the US moved at once to escalate the attacks on soft targets in Nicaragua. Right at the moment when indignation over Washington’s clandestine operations peaked,

⁶ See Noam Chomsky, *The Culture of Terrorism* (South End, 1988), pp. 43, 77.

was held hostage under the threat of terror to ensure its acceptance of the political arrangements dictated by Israel for southern Lebanon and the occupied territories. The threat can be realized at will. To cite only one case, while the eyes of the world were focused in horror on Arab terrorists, the press reported that Israeli tank cannon poured fire into the village of Sreifa in southern Lebanon, aiming at 30 houses from which the Israeli Army claimed they had been fired upon by “armed terrorists,” resisting their military actions as they searched for two Israeli soldiers who had been “kidnapped” in the “security zone” Israel has carved out of Lebanon. Kept from the American press was the report by the UN peacekeeping forces that the IDF “went really crazy” in these operations, locking up entire villages, preventing the UN forces from sending in water, milk, and oranges to the villagers subjected to “interrogation” by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) or its local mercenaries. The IDF then left with many hostages including pregnant women, some taken to Israel in further violation of international law, destroying houses and looting and wrecking others. Prime Minister Shimon Peres, lauded in the US as a man of peace, said that Israel’s search “expresses our attitude towards the value of human life and dignity.”⁴¹

To the Israeli high command, the victims of the Iron Fist operations were “terrorist villagers;” it was thus understandable that 13 villagers were massacred by militiamen of the Israeli mercenary forces in the incident that elicited this observation. Yossi Olmert of the Shiloah Institute, Israel’s Institute of Strategic Studies, observed that “these terrorists operate with the support of most of the local population.” An Israeli commander complained that “the terrorist... has many eyes here, because he lives here.” The military correspondent of the *Jerusalem Post* (Hirsh Goodman) described the problems faced in combating the “terrorist mercenary,” “fanatics, all of whom are sufficiently dedicated to their causes to go on

⁴¹ See Chomsky, *Pirates and Emperors*, p. 69.

suppress the Palestinian uprising (Intifada) by “harsh military and economic pressure” so that “they will be broken.”³⁹

The issue of terrorism versus resistance arose at once during the US-PLO discussions. The protocols of the first meeting were leaked and published in the *Jerusalem Post*, which expressed its pleasure that “the American representative adopted the Israeli positions,” stating two crucial conditions that the PLO must accept: the PLO must call off the Intifada, and must abandon the idea of an international conference. With regard to the Intifada, the US stated its position as follows:

Undoubtedly the internal struggles that we are witnessing in the occupied territories aim to undermine the security and stability of the State of Israel, and we therefore demand cessation of those riots, *which we view as terrorist acts against Israel*. This is especially true as we know you are directing, from outside the territories, those riots which are sometimes very violent.⁴⁰

Once this “terrorism” is called off and the previous conditions of repression restored, the US and Israel can proceed to settle matters to their satisfaction. Again, the resistance of an oppressed population to a brutal military occupation is “terror,” from the point of view of the occupiers and their paymaster.

The same issue arose during the 1985 Iron Fist operations of the Israeli army in southern Lebanon. These too were guided by the logic outlined by Abba Eban, cited earlier. The civilian population

³⁹ For details, see Chomsky, *Necessary Illusions*; also Chomsky, “The Trollope Ploy,” *Z Magazine* (March 1989); Chomsky, “The Art of Evasion: Diplomacy in the Middle East,” *Z Magazine* (January 1990).

⁴⁰ Emphasis in *Jerusalem Post*. See references of preceding note. The unacceptability of an international conference follows from the opposition of the US and Israel to a political settlement of the kind supported by most of the world community.

Congress and the media kept their eyes scrupulously averted from the rapid increase in CIA supply flights to several a day, while cooperating with the White House program of dismantling the unwanted accords, a goal finally achieved in January 1988; though further steps were required to subvert a follow-up agreement of the Central American presidents in February 1989.⁷

As supply and surveillance flights for the proxy forces increased, so did violence and terror, as intended. This too passed largely unnoticed, though an occasional reference could be found. The *Los Angeles Times* reported in October 1987 that “Western military analysts say the contras have been stashing tons of newly dropped weapons lately while trying to avoid heavy combat... Meanwhile, they have stepped up attacks on easy government targets like the La Patriota farm cooperative..., where several militiamen, an elderly woman and her year-old grandson died in a pre-dawn shelling.” To select virtually at random from the many cases deemed unworthy of notice, on November 2, 1987, 150 Contras attacked two villages in the southern province of Rio San Juan with 88-mm mortars and rocket-propelled grenades, killing six children and six adults and injuring 30 others. Even cooperatives of religious pacifists who refused to bear arms were destroyed by the US terrorist forces. In El Salvador too, the army attacks cooperatives, killing, raping and abducting members.⁸

The decision of the International Court of Justice in June 1986 condemning the United States for the “unlawful use of force” and

⁷ For details on the highly successful demolition job, see Chomsky, *Culture of Terrorism and Necessary Illusions*. On the immediate destruction of the Esquipulas IV accords of February 1989 by the White House and congressional doves with media cooperation, see Chomsky, “The Tasks Ahead: 1,” *Z Magazine* (May 1989).

⁸ Richard Boudreaux and Marjorie Miller, *Los Angeles Times* (October 5, 1988); Associated Press, November 21, 1987; Witness for Peace, *Civilian Victims of the US Contra War* (February-July 1987), p. 5. Americas Watch, *The Civilian Toll 1986-1987* (August 30, 1987); Americas Watch Petition to US Trade Representative (May 29, 1987).

illegal economic warfare was dismissed as an irrelevant pronouncement by a “hostile forum” (*New York Times*). Little notice was taken when the US vetoed a Security Council resolution calling on all states to observe international law and voted against General Assembly resolutions to the same effect (with Israel and El Salvador in 1986; with Israel alone in 1987). The guiding principle, it appears, is that the US is a lawless terrorist state and *this is right and just*, whatever the world may think, whatever international institutions may declare.

A corollary is the doctrine that no state has the right to defend itself from US attack. The broad acquiescence in this remarkable doctrine was revealed as Reagan administration agitprop floated periodic stories about Nicaraguan plans to obtain jet interceptors. There was some criticism of the media for uncritically swallowing the disinformation, but a more significant fact was ignored: the general agreement that such behavior on the part of Nicaragua would be entirely unacceptable. When the tale was concocted to divert attention from the Nicaraguan elections of 1984, Senator Paul Tsongas of Massachusetts, with the support of other leading doves, warned that the US would have to bomb Nicaragua if it obtained vintage 1950s MiGs, because “they’re also capable against the United States,” hence a threat to its security — as distinct, say, from US nuclear missiles on alert status in Turkey, no threat to the USSR since they are purely for defensive purposes.⁹ It is understood that jet interceptors might enable Nicaragua to protect its territory from the CIA supply flights needed to keep the US proxy forces in the field and the regular surveillance flights that provide them with up-to-the-minute information on the disposition of Nicaraguan troops, so that they can safely attack soft targets. Understood, but scarcely mentioned.¹⁰ And it seems that

⁹ *Boston Globe* (November 9, 1984), citing also similar comments by Democratic dove Christopher Dodd.

¹⁰ A search of the liberal *Boston Globe*, perhaps the least antagonistic to the Sandinistas among major US journals, revealed one editorial reference to the fact

UN resolutions. Yasser Arafat repeated the same positions in subsequent weeks in Europe, including a special session of the UN General Assembly convened in Geneva when he was barred from New York, in violation of legal obligations to the United Nations, on the grounds that his presence there would pose an unacceptable threat to the security of the United States. The reiteration by the PNC and Arafat of the UN terrorism resolution was denounced in the United States on the grounds that the Palestinian leadership had failed to meet Washington’s conditions on good behavior, including “Rejection of terrorism in all its forms” without qualification. The qualification in question is the one endorsed by the world community with the exception of the US and Israel (and South Africa).

The editors of the *New York Times* ridiculed the PNC endorsement of international conventions on terrorism as “the old Arafat hedge.” Anthony Lewis, who is at the outer limits of tolerable dissent on these matters, wrote that Arafat was progressing, but not sufficiently: “the United States says correctly that the PLO must unambiguously renounce all terrorism before it can take part in negotiations,” and this proper condition had not yet been met. The general reaction largely fell within these bounds.

The reasoning is straightforward. The PLO had refused to join the US, Israel and South Africa off the spectrum of world opinion, and therefore merits either derision (from the hardliners) or encouragement for its limited but insufficient progress (from the dissidents).

When the US became isolated diplomatically, by December 1988, Washington moved to a fall-back position, pretending that Arafat had capitulated to US demands, though his position had not changed in any substantive way — for years, in fact. With Arafat’s capitulation to US demands now official, by US stipulation, he could be rewarded by discussions with the US Ambassador in Tunis. As was underscored by Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin, the US-PLO discussions were designed to deflect diplomatic pressures for settlement and to grant Israel a year or more to

position towards the South Vietnamese who bore the brunt of the US attack.

On similar grounds, South Africa [during the apartheid years] takes strong exception to the international conventions on terrorism. Specifically, it objects to UN General Assembly Resolution 42/159 (December 7, 1987) because, while condemning international terrorism and outlining measures to combat it, the General Assembly:

Considers that nothing in the present resolution could in any way prejudice the right to self-determination, freedom and independence, as derived from the Charter of the United Nations, of peoples, forcibly deprived of that right..., particularly peoples under colonial and racist regimes and foreign occupation or other forms of colonial domination, nor... the right of these peoples to struggle to this end and to seek and receive support [in accordance with the Charter and other principles of international law].³⁸

While this provision is endorsed by virtually the entire world community, South Africa is not entirely alone in opposing it. The resolution passed 153 to 2, with the United States and Israel opposed and Honduras alone abstaining. In this case, the stand of the US government won wide approval in the United States. Across the spectrum of articulate opinion in the US, it is implicitly taken for granted that the South African position is correct, indeed beyond controversy.

The issue came to a head in late 1988 in connection with the Israel-Palestinian conflict. In November, the Palestinian National Council (PNC) declared an independent Palestinian state alongside of Israel, endorsing the UN terrorism resolution and other relevant

³⁸ Text appears as Appendix III, *State Terrorism at Sea*, EAFORD Paper 44, Chicago, 1988.

no one in the mainstream released the open secret that Nicaragua would happily accept French planes instead of MiGs if the US had not pressured its allies to bar military aid so that we might cower in fear of “the Soviet-supplied Sandinistas.”

The same issue arose in August 1988, when congressional doves effusively supported the Byrd Amendment on “Assistance for the Nicaraguan Resistance.” Three days before, the Contras had attacked the passenger vessel *Mission of Peace*, killing two people and wounding 27, all civilians, including a Baptist minister from New Jersey who headed a US religious delegation. The incident was unmentioned in the Senate debate on the Byrd Amendment. Rather, congressional doves warned that if the Nicaraguan army carried out “an unprovoked military attack” or “any other hostile action” against the perpetrators of such terrorist atrocities, then Congress would respond with vigor and righteousness by renewing official military aid to them. Media coverage and other commentary found nothing odd or noteworthy in this stance.

The message is clear: no one has the right of self-defense against US terrorist attack. The US is a terrorist state *by right*. That is unchallengeable doctrine.

Accordingly, organization of a terrorist proxy army to subdue some recalcitrant population is a legitimate chore. On the right, Jeane Kirkpatrick explained that “forceful intervention in the affairs of another nation” is neither “impractical” nor “immoral”¹¹ — merely illegal, a crime for which people were hanged at Nuremberg and Tokyo with ringing declarations that this was not “victor’s justice” because, as Justice Robert Jackson proclaimed, “If certain acts and violations of treaties are crimes, they are crimes whether the United States does them or whether Germany does them. We are not prepared to lay down a rule of criminal conduct against oth-

that Nicaragua needs air power “to repel attacks by the CIA-run contras, and to stop or deter supply flights” (November 9, 1986).

¹¹ Jeane Kirkpatrick, “US Security and Latin America,” *Commentary* (January 1981), p. 29.

ers which we would not be willing to have invoked against us.¹² Countering any such thoughts, Irving Kristol explains that “The argument from international law lacks all credibility.” True, “a great power should not ordinarily intervene in the domestic affairs of a smaller nation,” but this principle is overcome if “another great power has previously breached this rule.” Since it is “beyond dispute” that “the Soviet Union has intervened in Nicaragua” by providing arms and technicians “in both the military and civilian spheres,” then the US has the right to send its proxy army to attack Nicaragua. By the same argument, the Soviet Union has a perfect right to attack Turkey or Denmark — far more of a security threat to it than Nicaragua is to the United States — since it is “beyond dispute” that the US provides them with assistance, and would do far more if the USSR were to exercise the right of aggression accorded it by Kristol’s logic.

Kristol might, however, counter this argument too by invoking a crucial distinction that he has drawn elsewhere in connection with the right of forceful intervention by the United States: “insignificant nations, like insignificant people, can quickly experience delusions of significance,” he explained. And when they do, these delusions must be driven from their minds by force: “In truth, the days of ‘gunboat diplomacy’ are never over... Gunboats are as necessary for international order as police cars are for domestic order.” Hence the US is entitled to use violence against Nicaragua, an insignificant nation, though the USSR lacks this right in the case of Turkey or Denmark.¹³

The overwhelming endorsement for US-directed international terrorism should not be obscured by the wide elite opposition to the Contra war. By 1986, polls showed that 80 percent of “leaders” opposed aid to the Contras, and there was vigorous debate in

¹² Cited by Stohl, “States, Terrorism and State Terrorism.”

¹³ Irving Kristol, “Why a Debate Over Contra Aid?” *Wall Street Journal* (April 11, 1986); Kristol, “Where Have All the Gunboats Gone?” *Wall Street Journal* (December 13, 1973).

were a particular target. The Haganah Special Actions Squads carried out “punitive actions” against Jewish informers. A Haganah prison in Haifa contained a torture chamber for interrogation of Jews suspected of collaboration with the British. In a 1988 interview, Dov Tsisis describes his work as a Haganah enforcer, “following orders, like the Nazis,” to “eliminate” Jews interfering with the national struggle, “particularly informers.”

He also rejects the familiar charge that the murderous bombing of the King David Hotel was carried out by the Irgun alone, identifying himself as the special representative of Haganah commander Yitzhak Sadeh, who authorized it. He was later recommended by Moshe Dayan to replace him as commander of an elite unit. Anti-Nazi resisters also describe the murder of collaborators, throughout Europe. Israel Shahak, one of Israel’s foremost civil libertarians and a survivor of the Warsaw ghetto and the concentration camps, recalls that “before the Warsaw ghetto revolt, ... the Jewish underground, with complete justification, killed every Jewish collaborator that they could find.” He recalls a vivid childhood memory from February 1943, “when I danced and sang together with other children around the body [of a murdered Jewish collaborator], with blood still flowing from his body, and to the present I have no regrets about that; on the contrary.”³⁷

While frank avowal of terrorism of the Shamir variety can occasionally be found, the more normal pattern is for actions undertaken against oppressive regimes and occupying armies to be considered resistance by their perpetrators and terrorism by the rulers, even when they are non-violent. What the Western democracies considered to be resistance in occupied Europe or Afghanistan, the Nazis and the USSR branded terror — in fact, terror inspired from abroad, therefore international terrorism. The US took the same

³⁷ See Chomsky, *Fateful Triangle*, pp. 164-5n.; Gafi Amir, *Yediot Ahronot Supplement* (August 14, 1988); Israel Shahak, “Distortion of the Holocaust,” *Kol Ha’ir* (May 19, 1989).

obvious arguments.” “Neither Jewish morality nor Jewish tradition can be used to disallow terror as a means of war,” he wrote, and “We are very far from any moral hesitations when concerned with the national struggle.” “First and foremost, terror is for us a part of the political war appropriate for the circumstances of today, and its task is a major one: it demonstrates in the clearest language, heard throughout the world including by our unfortunate brethren outside the gates of this country, our war against the occupier.” As has been widely observed in Israel, the British occupation was far less repressive than Israel’s rule in the occupied territories and faced a much more violent resistance.

British philosopher Isaiah Berlin recalls that Chaim Weizmann, first president of Israel and considered one of the saintly figures of the national movement,

did not think it morally decent to denounce either the acts [of Jewish terrorism] or their perpetrators in public... he did not propose to speak out against acts, criminal as he thought them, which sprang from the tormented minds of men driven to desperation, and ready to give up their lives to save their brothers from what, he and they were equally convinced, was a betrayal and a destruction cynically prepared for them by the foreign offices of the western powers.³⁶

The archives of the mainstream Zionist resistance group, Haganah, contain the names of 40 Jews killed by Menachem Begin’s Irgun and Lehi. Yitzhak Shamir’s personal assassination of a Lehi associate is a famous incident. The official Irgun history, while recalling with admiration many acts of terror against Arab civilians, also cites the murder of a Jewish member who, it was feared, would give information to the police if captured. Suspected collaborators

³⁶ Shamir, “Terror,” *Hazit* (August 1943); parts reprinted in *Al Hamishmar* (December 24, 1987); Berlin, *Personal Impressions* (Viking, 1981), p. 50.

Congress and the media about the program. But it is important to attend to the terms of the debate. At the dissident extreme, Tom Wicker of the *New York Times* observed that “Mr. Reagan’s policy of supporting [the Contras] is a clear failure,” so we should “acquiesce in some negotiated regional arrangement that would be enforced by Nicaragua’s neighbors” — if they can take time away from slaughtering their own populations, a feature of these terror states that does not exclude them from the role of enforcing regional arrangements on the errant Sandinistas, against whom no remotely comparable charge could credibly be made. Expressing the same thought, the editors of the *Washington Post* saw the Contras as “an imperfect instrument,” so that other means must be sought to “fit Nicaragua back into a Central American mode” and impose “reasonable conduct by a regional standard,” the standard of Washington’s terror states. Senate Majority Whip Alan Cranston, a leading dove, recognized that “the Contra effort is woefully inadequate to achieve ... democracy in Nicaragua” (the US aim by doctrinal fiat, whatever the facts may be), so the US must find other means to “isolate” the “reprehensible” government in Managua and “leave it to fester in its own juices.” No such strictures hold for Washington’s murderous clients.¹⁴

In short, there is little deviation from the basic terms of Michael Kinsley’s “sensible policy.” The questions have to do with efficacy, not principle. The state has the right to use violence as deemed appropriate.

The motivation for the resort to international terrorism has been candidly explained. High administration officials observed that the goal of the attack against Nicaragua was “forcing [the Sandinistas] to divert scarce resources to the war and away from social programs.” This was the basic thrust of the 1981 CIA program endorsed by the administration. As outlined by former CIA analyst David MacMichael in his testimony before the World Court, this

¹⁴ See Chomsky, *Necessary Illusions*, p. 60

program has as its purpose: to use the proxy army to “provoke cross-border attacks by Nicaraguan forces and thus serve to demonstrate Nicaragua’s aggressive nature,” to pressure the Nicaraguan Government to “clamp down on civil liberties within Nicaragua itself, arresting its opposition, demonstrating its allegedly inherent totalitarian nature and thus increase domestic dissent within the country,” and to undermine the shattered economy. Discussing the strategy of maintaining a terrorist force within Nicaragua after the huge CIA supply operation was theoretically cancelled by Congress in February 1988 (and the proxy forces largely fled, revealing — though not to articulate opinion — how little resemblance they bore to indigenous guerillas), a Defense Department official explained:

“Those 2000 hard-core guys could keep some pressure on the Nicaraguan government, force them to use their economic resources for the military, and prevent them from solving their economic problems — and that’s a plus... Anything that puts pressure on the Sandinista regime, calls attention to the lack of democracy, and prevents the Sandinistas from solving their economic problems is a plus.”

Viron Vaky, Assistant Secretary of State for Interamerican Affairs in the Carter administration, observed that the principal argument for the terrorist attack is that “a longer war of attrition will so weaken the regime, provoke such a radical hardening of repression, and win sufficient support from Nicaragua’s discontented population that sooner or later the regime will be overthrown by popular revolt, self-destruct by means of internal coups or leadership splits, or simply capitulate to salvage what it can.” As a dove, Vaky regards the conception as “flawed” but in no way wrong.¹⁵

¹⁵ Julia Preston, *Boston Globe* (February 9, 1986); MacMichael, see Chomsky *Culture of Terrorism*; Doyle McManus, *Los Angeles Times* (May 28, 1988); Vaky, see Chomsky, *Necessary Illusions*.

the US proxy forces in what the administration gleefully described as a virtual declaration of war.³³

6. Terror and Resistance

Let us turn now to several contentious questions about the scope of terrorism, so far avoided.

Consider the boundary between terrorism and legitimate resistance. Sometimes, nationalist groups are prepared to describe their actions as terrorism, and some respected political leaders decline to condemn acts of terrorism in the national cause. An example particularly relevant to current discussion is the pre-state Zionist movement. Israel is the source of the 1980s “terrorism industry” (then transferred to the US for further development), as an ideological weapon against the Palestinians.³⁴ The PLO is anathema in the United States. A special act of Congress, the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1987, “prohibits American citizens from receiving any assistance, funds, or anything of value except informational materials from the PLO,” which is not permitted to establish offices or other facilities to further its interests.³⁵ Palestinian violence has received worldwide condemnation.

The pre-state Zionist movement carried out extensive terror against Arab civilians, British, and Jews, also murdering UN mediator Folke Bernadotte (whose killers were protected after the state was established). In 1943, current Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir wrote an article entitled “Terror” for the journal of the terrorist organization he headed (Lehi) in which he proposed to “dismiss all the ‘phobia’ and babble against terror with simple,

³³ James LeMoyné, “Week in Review,” *New York Times* (June 29, 1986).

³⁴ See Edward S. Herman, *The Terrorism Industry* (Pantheon, 1990); Herman and Gerry O’Sullivan, “‘Terrorism’ as Ideology and Cultural Industry,” this volume.

³⁵ Lawrence Harke, “The Anti-Terrorism Act of 1987 and American Freedoms: A Critical Review,” *University of Miami Law Review*, 43 (1989), pp. 667f.

without parallel for the year as sustained acts of international terrorism in the Middle East, and the bombing of Tunis (with tacit US support) wins second prize for single terrorist acts, unless we take this to be a case of actual aggression, as was determined by the UN Security Council.³¹

In 1986, the major single terrorist act was the US bombing of Libya — assuming, again, that we do not assign this attack to the category of aggression. This was a brilliantly staged media event, the first bombing in history scheduled for prime-time TV, for the precise moment when the networks open their national news programs. This convenient arrangement allowed anchormen to switch at once to Tripoli so that their viewers could watch the exciting events live. The next act of superbly crafted TV drama was a series of news conferences and White House statements explaining that this was “self-defense against future attack” and a measured response to a disco bombing in West Berlin ten days earlier for which Libya was [allegedly] to blame. The media were well aware that the evidence for this charge was slight, but the facts were ignored in the general adulation for Reagan’s decisive stand against terrorism, echoed across the political spectrum. Crucial information undermining the US charges was suppressed from that moment on. It was later conceded quietly that the charges were groundless, but they nevertheless continued to be aired and the conclusions that follow from this belated recognition were never drawn.³²

For 1986 too the United States seems to place well in the competition for the prize for international terrorism, even apart from the wholesale terrorism it sponsored in Central America, where, in that year, Congress responded to the World Court call for an end to the “unlawful use of force” by voting \$100 million of military aid to

³¹ For a review of the Iron Fist operations and the Tunis bombing, see Chomsky, *Pirates and Emperors*, chapter 2.

³² For details, see Chomsky, *Pirates and Emperors*, chapter 3; Chomsky, *Necessary Illusions*, pp. 272–3; and sources cited.

The terrorist forces fully understand their directives, as we learn from one of the most important defectors of the 1980s, the head of intelligence of the main Contra force (FDN), Horacio Arce, whose *nom de guerre* was “Mercenario”, — talk of “democrats” and “freedom fighters” is for home consumption. Sandinista defectors are eagerly exploited by the White House and the media, and the Contras generally received extensive coverage. Contra *defectors* are another matter, particularly when they have unwelcome tales to relate. Arce was ignored in the US when he defected in late 1988. In interviews in Mexico before returning to Managua to accept amnesty, Arce described his illegal training in an air force base in the southern United States, identified by name the CIA agents who provided support for the Contras under the AID cover in the US Embassy in Tegucigalpa, outlined how the Honduran army provides intelligence and support for Contra military activities, and discussed the immense corruption of the proxy forces and their sale of arms to the Honduran arms bazaar where they then reach Salvadoran guerillas. He then explained: “We attack a lot of schools, health centers, and those sort of things. We have tried to make it so that the Nicaraguan government cannot provide social services for the peasants, cannot develop its project... that’s the idea.” The success of the US training is amply confirmed by the record.¹⁶

The contra war easily qualifies as “state-sponsored terrorism,” as former CIA director Stansfield Turner testified before Congress in April 1985. But one might argue that it should be termed outright aggression. That might be taken to be the import of the 1986 World Court decision. Let us, however, continue to give the US the benefit of the doubt, thus assigning its actions against Nicaragua to the category of international terrorism.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 204–5.

3. International Terrorism in the 1980s

During the 1980s, the primary locus of international terrorism has been Central America. In Nicaragua the US proxy forces left a trail of murder, torture, rape, mutilation, kidnapping, and destruction, but were impeded because civilians had an army to defend them. No comparable problems arose in the US client states, where the main terrorist force attacking the civilian population is the army and other state security forces. In El Salvador, tens of thousands were slaughtered in what Archbishop Rivera y Damas in October 1980, shortly after the operations moved into high gear, described as “a war of extermination and genocide against a defenseless civilian population.” This exercise in state terror sought “to destroy the people’s organizations fighting to defend their fundamental human rights,” as Archbishop Oscar Romero warned shortly before his assassination, while vainly pleading with President Carter not to send aid to the armed forces who, he continued, “know only how to repress the people and defend the interests of the Salvadorean oligarchy.”¹⁷ The goals were largely achieved during the Reagan administration, which escalated the savagery of the assault against the population to new heights. When it seemed that the US might be drawn into an invasion that would be harmful to its own interests, there was some concern and protest in elite circles, but that abated as state terror appeared successful, with the popular organizations decimated and “decapitated.” After elections under conditions of violence and repression guaranteeing victory to privileged elements acceptable to the US, the issue largely passed below the threshold.

Little notice was taken of the significant increase in state terror after the Esquipulas II accords; or of an Amnesty International report entitled *El Salvador: “Death Squads” – A Government Strategy*

¹⁷ Rivera y Damas quoted in Ray Bonner, *Weakness and Deceit* (Times Books, 1984), p. 207; Romero quoted in Jenny Pearce, *Under the Eagle* (Latin America Bureau, 1981).

where mercenaries were trained for terrorist acts in Central America and elsewhere. According to ex-mercenaries, Camper had close ties to US intelligence and was personally involved in the Air India bombing, allegedly a “sting” operation that got out of control. On a visit of India, Attorney-General Edwin Meese conceded in a backhanded way that the terrorist operations originated in a US terrorist training camp.²⁹ Any connection of a terrorist to Libya, however frail, suffices to demonstrate that Qaddafi is a “mad dog” who must be eliminated.

In the Middle East, the main center of international terrorism according to the canon, the worst single terrorist act of 1985 was a car-bombing in Beirut on March 8 that killed 80 people and wounded 256. “About 250 girls and women in flowing black chadors, pouring out of Friday prayers at the Imam Rida Mosque, took the brunt of the blast,” Nora Boustany reported three years later: “At least 40 of them were killed and many more were maimed.” The bomb also “burned babies in their beds, killed a bride buying her trousseau,” and “blew away three children as they walked home from the mosque” as it “devastated the main street of the densely populated” West Beirut suburb. The target was the Shi’ite leader Sheikh Fadlallah, accused of complicity in terrorism, but he escaped. The attack was arranged by the CIA and its Saudi clients with the assistance of Lebanese intelligence and a British specialist, and specifically authorized by CIA director William Casey, according to Bob Woodward’s account in his book on Casey and the CIA.³⁰

Even under its chosen conventions, then, it seems that the United States wins the prize for acts of international terrorism in the peak year of the official plague. The US client state of Israel follows closely behind. Its Iron Fist operations in Lebanon were

²⁹ Leslie Cockburn, *Out of Control* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 1987), p. 26; Chomsky, *Pirates and Emperors*, p. 136.

³⁰ Boustany, *Washington Post Weekly* (March 14, 1988); Woodward, *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA 1981–1987* (Simon & Schuster, 1987), pp. 396f.

legal adviser Abraham Sofaer, who notes that the policy was “re-examined” from the late 1960s – when the US and its allies were targeted). Sofaer’s comment understates the case. A Tass report condemning the *Achille Lauro* hijacking accused Washington of hypocrisy because two men who hijacked a Soviet airliner, killing a stewardess and wounding other crew members, were given refuge in the United States, which refused extradition.²⁷

The first airplane hijacking in the Middle East also falls outside the canon: Israel’s hijacking of a Syrian airways civilian jet in 1954, with the intent “to get hostages in order to obtain the release of our prisoners in Damascus,” who had been captured on a spy mission in Syria (Prime Minister Moshe Sharett). Sharett accepted the “factual affirmation of the US State Department that our action was without precedent in the history of international practice.” In October 1956, the Israeli air force shot down an unarmed Egyptian civilian plane, killing 16 people including four journalists, in a failed attempt to assassinate Field Marshall Abdul Hakim Amar, second to President Nasser, at a time when the two countries were not in a state of war. This was a preplanned operation, thus unlike Israel’s downing of a Libyan civilian airliner with 110 killed as it was lost in a sandstorm two minutes flight time from Cairo, towards which it was heading. This February 1973 action took place while Israeli airborne and amphibious forces were attacking Tripoli in northern Lebanon, killing 31 people (mainly civilians) and destroying classrooms, clinics, and other buildings in a raid justified as preemptive.²⁸ All of this was (and is) dismissed as insignificant, if even noticed. The reaction to Arab terrorism is quite different.

Turning to the 1980s, consider 1985, when media concern peaked. The major single terrorist act of the year was the blowing up of an Air India flight, killing 329 people. The terrorists had been trained in a paramilitary camp in Alabama run by Frank Camper,

²⁷ Sofaer, *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1986; *New York Times* (October 12, 1985).

²⁸ See Chomsky, *Pirates and Emperors*, pp. 92–3, 108; *Ha’aretz* (April 5, 1989).

(October 1988), reporting the “alarming rise” in killings by official death squads as part of the government strategy of intimidating any potential opposition by “killing and mutilating victims in the most macabre way,” leaving victims “mutilated, decapitated, dismembered, strangled or showing marks of torture... or rape.” Since the goal of the government strategy is “to intimidate or coerce a civilian population” (that is, terrorism, as officially defined in the US Code), it is not enough simply to kill. Rather, bodies must be left dismembered by the roadside, and women must be found hanging from trees by their hair with their faces painted red and their breasts cut off, while domestic elites pretend not to see as they continue to fund, train, and support the murderers and torturers.

In the same years, a massacre of even greater scale took place in Guatemala, also supported throughout by the United States and its mercenary states. Here too, terror increased after the Esquipulas II peace agreement in order to guard against steps towards democracy, social reform, and protection of human rights called for in the accords. As in El Salvador, these developments were virtually ignored; the assigned task at the time was to focus attention on Nicaragua and to express vast outrage when Nicaragua occasionally approached the *lesser* abuses that are regular practices in the US client states. Since the goal is to restore Nicaragua to “the Central American mode” and ensure that it observes the “regional standards” satisfied by El Salvador and Guatemala, terror in client states is of no real concern, unless it becomes so visible as to endanger the flow of aid to the killers.¹⁸

Notice crucially that all of this is *international* terrorism, supported or directly organized in Washington with the assistance of its international network of mercenary states.

Well after the 1984 elections that were hailed for having brought democracy to El Salvador, the church-based human rights organization Socorro Juridico, operating under the protection of the arch-

¹⁸ For documentation on these matters, see Chomsky *Necessary Illusions*

diocese of San Salvador, described the results of the continuing terror, still conducted by “the same members of the armed forces who enjoy official approval and are adequately trained to carry out these acts of collective suffering,” in the following terms:

Salvadoran society, affected by terror and panic, a result of the persistent violation of basic human rights, shows the following traits: collective intimidation and generalized fear, on the one hand, and on the other the internalized acceptance of the terror because of the daily and frequent use of violent means. In general, society accepts the frequent appearance of tortured bodies, because basic rights, the right to life, has absolutely no overriding value for society.¹⁹

The same comment applies to the societies that oversee these operations, or simply look the other way.

4. Before the Official Plague

International terrorism is, of course, not an invention of the 1980s. In the previous two decades, its major victims were Cuba and Lebanon.

Anti-Cuban terrorism was directed by a secret Special Group established in November 1961 under the code name “Mongoose,” involving 400 Americans, 2,000 Cubans, a private navy of fast boats,

¹⁹ LADOC (Latin American Documentation), *Torture in Latin America* (LADOC, 1987), the report of the First International Seminar on Torture in Latin America (Buenos Aires, December 1985), devoted to “the repressive system” that “has at its disposal knowledge and a multinational technology of terror, developed in specialized centers whose purpose is to perfect methods of exploitation, oppression and dependence of individuals and entire peoples” by the use of “state terrorism inspired by the Doctrine of National Security.” This doctrine can be traced to the historic decision of the Kennedy administration to shift the mission of the Latin American military to “internal security,” with far-reaching consequences.

5. The Canon: Retail Terrorism

Wholesale terrorism of the kind reviewed here has largely been excluded from the discussion of “the evil scourge of terrorism.” Let us then turn to the smaller-scale acts of terror that fall within the canon.

Here too, the record goes back well before the 1980s, though the literature is too selective to be very useful. To mention a few examples not found in Laqueur’s standard source, while he refers to the use of letter-bombs and “a primitive book bomb” used by Israeli intelligence to kill General Mustapha Hafez in Gaza in 1956 at a time when he was responsible for preventing Palestinian Fedayeen from infiltrating to attack Israeli targets.²⁵ Laqueur’s review of the use of letter-bombs does not include the testimony of Ya’akov Eliav, who claims to have been the first to use letter-bombs when he served as a commander of the terrorist group headed by the current [c. 1991] prime minister of Israel, Yitzhak Shamir (Lehi, the “Stern gang”). Working from Paris in 1946, he arranged to have 70 such bombs sent in official British government envelopes to all members of the British cabinet, the heads of the Tory opposition, and several military commanders. In June 1947, he and an accomplice were caught by Belgian police while attempting to send these letter-bombs, and all were intercepted.²⁶

The standard record of hijacking and bombing of airliners also avoids some important topics, among them the US refusal of requests from communist countries in the 1950s to return “persons who hijacked planes, trains, and ships to escape” (State Department

²⁵ Ehud Ya’ari, *Egypt and the Fedayeen* (Hebrew) (Givat Haviva, 1975), pp. 27f, a study based on captured Egyptian and Jordanian documents. At the same time, Salah Mustapha, Egyptian military attaché in Jordan, was severely injured by a letter-bomb sent from East Jerusalem, presumably from the same source; *ibid.*

²⁶ Israeli military historian Uri Milshtein, *Hadashot* (December 31, 1987), referring to Eliav’s 1983 book *Hamevukash*.

aeroplanes and seized embassies.” The reaction was much the same, he continues, when Israeli death squads were operating in southern Lebanon after the 1982 Israeli invasion. One could read about them in the London *Times*, but US editors were not interested. Had the media reported the operations of “these death squads of plainclothes Shin Beth [secret police] men who assassinated suspects in the villages and camps of south Lebanon,” “stirring up the Shiite Muslim population and helping to make the Marine presence untenable,” there might have been some appreciation of the plight of the US Marines deployed in Lebanon. They seemed to have no idea of why they were there apart from “the black enlisted men: almost all of them said, though sadly never on camera, that they had been sent to protect the rich against the poor.” “The only people in Lebanon they identified with were the poor Shiite refugees who lived all around their base at the Beirut airport; it is sad that it was probably one of these poor Shiites... who killed 241 of them on 23 October 1983.” If any of these matters had been reported, it might have been possible to avert, or at the very least to comprehend, the bombing in which the Marines were killed, victims of a policy that “the press could not explain to the public and their information officers could not explain to the Marines themselves.”

In 1976, Syria entered Lebanon with US approval and helped implement further massacres, the major one at the Palestinian refugee camp of Tel Al-Zaater, where thousands were murdered by Syrian-backed Christian forces with Israeli arms.²⁴

Without proceeding further, it is clear that the plague of state-directed international terrorism was rampant well before it was converted into a major issue by the “public diplomacy” of the Reagan administration.

²⁴ Charles Glass, “No News is Bad News,” *Index on Censorship* (January 1989). See Chomsky, *Fateful Triangle*, pp. 184f, and sources cited.

and a \$50 million annual budget, run in part by a Miami CIA station functioning in violation of the Neutrality Act and, presumably, the law banning CIA operations in the United States.²⁰ These operations included bombing of hotels and industrial installations, sinking of fishing boats, poisoning of crops and livestock, contamination of sugar exports, etc. Not all of these actions were specifically authorized by the CIA, but no such considerations absolve official enemies.

Several of these terrorist operations took place at the time of the Cuban missile crisis of October–November 1962. In the weeks before, Raymond Garthoff reports, a Cuban terrorist group operating from Florida with US government authorization carried out “a daring speedboat strafing attack on a Cuban seaside hotel near Havana where Soviet military technicians were known to congregate, killing a score of Russians and Cubans;” and shortly after, attacked British and Cuban cargo ships and again raided Cuba, among other actions that were stepped up in early October. At one of the tensest moments of the missile crisis, on November 8, a terrorist team dispatched from the United States blew up a Cuban industrial facility after the *Mongoose* operations had been officially suspended. Fidel Castro alleged that 400 workers had been killed in this operation, guided by “photographs taken by spying planes.” This terrorist act, which might have set off a global nuclear war, evoked little comment when it was revealed. Attempts to assassinate Castro and other terror continued immediately after the crisis terminated, and were escalated by Nixon in 1969.²¹

²⁰ Raymond L. Garthoff, *Reflections on the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Brookings Institution, 1987), p. 17.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 16f, 78f, 89f, 98. See the references of note 1. Also Bradley Earl Ayers, *The War that Never Was* (Harper & Row, 1981); William Blum, *The CIA* (Zed Books, 1986), updated and republished in expanded form as *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since WWII* (Common Courage Press, 1995); Morris Morley, *Imperial State and Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 1987); Taylor Branch and George Crile, “The Kennedy Vendetta: Our Secret War on Cuba,” *Harper's* (August 1975).

Such operations continued after the Nixon years. In 1976, for example, two Cuban fishing vessels were attacked in April by boats from Miami, the main center of anti-Cuban terrorism worldwide. A few weeks later, the Cuban embassy in Portugal was bombed with two killed. In July, the Cuban mission to the UN in New York was bombed and there were bombings aimed at Cuban targets in the Caribbean and Colombia, along with the attempted bombing of a pro-Cuban meeting at the Academy of Music in New York. In August, two officials of the Cuban embassy in Argentina were kidnapped and Cubana airlines offices in Panama were bombed. The Cuban embassy in Venezuela was fired upon in October and the embassy in Madrid was bombed in November. In October, CIA-trained Cuban exiles bombed a Cubana civilian airliner, killing all 73 aboard, including Cuba's gold-medal-winning international fencing team. One of the agents of this terrorist operation, Bay of Pigs veteran Luis Posada Carriles, was sprung from the Venezuelan jail where he was held for the bombing; he mysteriously escaped and found his way to El Salvador, where he was put to work at the Ilopango military airbase to help organize the US terrorist operations in Nicaragua. The CIA attributed 89 terrorist operations in the US and the Caribbean area for 1969–79 to Cuban exile groups, and the major one, OMEGA 7, was identified by the FBI as the most dangerous terrorist group operating in the US during much of the 1970s.²²

Cuba figures heavily in scholarly work on international terrorism. Walter Laqueur's standard work (see note 1) contains many innuendos about Cuban sponsorship of terrorism, though little evidence. There is not a word, however, on the terrorist operations *against* Cuba. He writes that in "recent decades... the more oppressive regimes are not only free from terror, they have helped to

²² See Noam Chomsky, *Towards a New Cold War* (Pantheon, 1982), pp. 48–9; see Chomsky, *Culture of Terrorism*, p. 40; Stohl, "States, Terrorism and State Terrorism."

launch it against more permissive societies." The intended meaning is that the United States, a "permissive society," is one of the victims of international terrorism, while Cuba, an "oppressive regime," is one of the agents. To establish the conclusion it is necessary to suppress the fact that the US has undeniably launched major terrorist attacks against Cuba and is relatively free from terror itself; and if there is a case to be made against Cuba, Laqueur has signally failed to present it.

Turning to the second major example of the pre-Reagan period, in southern Lebanon from the early 1970s the population was held hostage with the "rational prospect, ultimately fulfilled, that affected populations would exert pressure for a cessation of hostilities" and acceptance of Israeli arrangements for the region (Abba Eban, commenting on Prime Minister Menachem Begin's account of atrocities in Lebanon committed under the Labor government, in the style "of regimes which neither Mr Begin nor I would dare to mention by name," Eban observed, acknowledging the accuracy of the account).²³ Notice that this justification, offered by a respected Labor party dove, places these actions squarely under the rubric of international terrorism (if not aggression).

Thousands were killed and hundreds of thousands driven from their homes in these attacks. Little is known because the matter was of no interest; PLO attacks against Israel in the same years, barbaric but on a far lesser scale, elicited great indignation and extensive coverage. ABC correspondent Charles Glass, then a journalist in Lebanon, found "little American editorial interest in the conditions of the south Lebanese. The Israeli raids and shelling of their villages, their gradual exodus from south Lebanon to the growing slums on the outskirts of Beirut were nothing compared to the lurid tales of the 'terrorists' who threatened Israel, hijacked

²³ *Jerusalem Post* (August 16, 1981); see Chomsky, *Fateful Triangle* (South End, 1983), Chapter 5, sections 1, 3.4, for further quotes, background, and description.