

# A bully in

**P**resident Ronald Reagan and his aides broke the law and lied about it. That, at least, is what the Democrats are now trying to prove in Washington's three-ring circus called the Iran-Contra hearings.

Curiously, while the Democrats howl and ululate about Central America and Iran, they have remained absolutely mute about what may have been a far more egregious and certainly more obvious violation of American and international law.

I am referring to the April, 1986 bombing of Libya by U.S. warplanes. Here we have a clear act of war and an equally clear attempt to assassinate a foreign leader. Yet, as these facts emerge, there has been hardly a peep of protest from anyone.

Recently, the BBC produced a superb documentary investigation into the events leading up to the American attack on Libya. What the BBC found in this exhaustive, well-researched and forcefully argued production is that the Reagan administration bombed the wrong country, tried to murder Khadafy, and did so for domestic political reasons. It's pretty damning stuff and also pretty convincing.

Here's the BBC argument: Terrorist attacks such as the bombing of the U.S. Marine HQ in Beirut, the Rome and Vienna airport attacks and the *Achille Lauro* affair had produced a sense of outrage and frustration across the U.S. The Reagan administration was under intense pressure to do something, to strike back. But where? There was no clear target.

Most Mideast experts believed such terrorist attacks were coming from Lebanese-based anarchist/militant groups that were often used by Syria and Iran. Libya,

# Capt. America's clothing



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however, loudly applauded some of these attacks and too often shot its mouth off, using typically bombastic Arabic rhetoric. Anyone familiar with the Mideast would at once discount such rodomontade — except the poorly informed warriors of the Reagan team. Loudmouthed Libya set itself up as the prime — and most convenient — target.

Then came the infamous Berlin disco bombing that served as Washington's pretext to attack Libya. America had "irrefutable proof" that Libya was guilty, claimed Reagan. Not so, found the BBC investigators. They interviewed top French, Italian and German security officials who all went on record to say that Syria, not Libya, was behind the attack. One of Israel's top intelligence agents, Rafi Eitan, also stated that Syria was the culprit.

The Americans, as I have been saying in this column for years, never produced any conclusive evidence to back their charges that Libya was the Vatican of world terrorism. The BBC quotes U.S. officials admitting that their evidence was "circumstantial" and, more tellingly, that Libya was attacked because Syria and Iran were too "difficult" and "dangerous" as targets.

Americans were thrilled by the attack and wallowed in jingoism. Reagan scored a triumph. But what about the truth? And what about the fact, never squarely faced by much of the U.S. media, that the U.S. tried to murder Khadafy?

I stood in the rubble of Khadafy's Tripoli headquarters. You don't drop sticks of 500-lb. bombs on someone's home in the middle of the night and then blandly claim, as the Americans did, that they had no intention of killing Khadafy. When his daughter was killed and two of his sons badly injured, the Americans said, "oops, sorry." Khadafy was obviously the target of an attempt at aerial assassination, as some U.S. officials have since admitted.

It was Syria, said the BBC, not Libya, that bombed the Berlin disco and tried next to blow up an Israeli airliner. The U.S. knowingly attacked the wrong country in order to placate irate Americans. Reagan recalled all too well how the mess over U.S. hostages in Iran had ruined Jimmy Carter's presidency.

Troublesome, even dangerous thoughts, Reagan and his men seem vulnerable to charges that they broke the U.S. law against trying to kill a foreign head of state and violated international law by an unprovoked attack on Libya. But no one seems ready to raise these questions. The public and politicians have been whipped into such an anti-Libyan and anti-Mideastern hysteria that reason and law have been suspended.

This is what happens when complex foreign issues are reduced to the comic book simplicity of Captain America vs. Mad Dog Moammar. The silence over Libya from the moral watchdogs of Congress and the media is thunderous.