

Toronto Sun Sun, May 11/86

America mired in Mideast mess

Sun readers, like the *Sun* itself, are hardly shy about expressing their opinions. Many have written in stating dismay at my recent opposition to the U.S. bombing of Libya. Has Margolis gone pro-Libyan? Not at all. I am strongly pro-American and that is why last month's attack on Libya so disturbed me.

Taken in isolation, punishing loudmouthed Col. Kaddafi was emotionally rewarding and seemed to make a point. Now, however, it appears that Syria, not Libya, may have been the real culprit behind the Berlin disco bombing. No big surprise: Syria, Iran and chaotic Lebanon are the real powerhouses of organized terrorism. Compared to them, Libya is only a bit player — albeit an attractive target.

Seen within the larger spectrum of the Mideast, the attack on Libya assumes a quite different, ominous character. I fear that the United States, in much the same manner it blundered into Vietnam, is slowly but surely stumbling into a new guerrilla war in the Mideast. All of the little isolated Mideastern conflicts in which the U.S. now is mixing could suddenly merge into a large, bloody regional war that no Americans want. Look at the map:

Moroccan troops in western Sahara, armed and financed by Washington, are fighting Polisario Front guerrillas. Shaky Tunisia, a U.S. protectorate, is likely to explode when its aged dictator, Habib Bourquiba, dies. To the south, in Chad, the CIA, with the French, is arming and advising the anti-Libyan army of Hissese Habre. In Sudan, U.S. influence, purchased at the cost of some billions, has collapsed with the fall of dictator Jafaar Nimieri.

ERIC MARGOLIS



Off the Libyan coast, a U.S. armada threatens to resume attacks. In response, Soviet warships are anchored at Tripoli and Benghazi, raising the ante in any new American attack. In neighboring Egypt, Gen. Hosni Mubarak's U.S.-sustained regime grows daily more precarious as nationalist and anti-American sentiment seethes.

Further east, Israel and Syria are growing at each other as spring war fever mounts. President Reagan, responding to mounting pressure from the closely allied American and Israeli right, this week threatened to attack Syria. No matter, it seems, that Syria, only 400 miles from the Soviet border, has a formal defence agreement with Moscow. And, virtually unnoticed, Lebanon has just entered its 12th year of barbaric civil war.

Iran and Iraq remain locked in a bloody war to the death. The U.S. is secretly funding Iraq's war effort through Saudi Arabia. Washington also provides Baghdad with economic support and vitally important spy satellite data on Iranian troop movements. Not surprisingly, the Iranians consider themselves at war with the United States.

When we look at the panorama, it begins to become evident that the U.S. attack on Libya is only the most recent, and most warlike example of the relentless involvement of America as a combatant in the Mideast's kaleidoscope of violence. The terrorism now spreading to Europe is, in large part, the fallout, the spillover of the Mideast's surging violence.

Yet no matter how popular Reagan's new Crusade against the Saracens, the U.S. cannot afford to sink any deeper into the treacherous quicksand of the Mideast. To do so means an utterly pointless, futile and self-defeating guerrilla war that would be against both America's and Israel's long-term interests. The only beneficiary of such a struggle would be the Soviet Union. Recall that Moscow built up its current military superiority while the U.S. was mired in the Vietnam war.

Worse, the most likely cause of nuclear war comes from escalating clashes between the superpowers in the Mideast. Preventing such a catastrophe should be the prime goal of American policy. Peacemaking — not fighting — ought to be America's priority in the Mideast. Peacemaking to settle the festering Palestinian problem, to assure Israel of security. Peacemaking so that the region — the world's most dangerous political fault zone — can start developing modern, stable societies instead of producing revenge-crazed terrorists and fanatics.

That is why I opposed — and still oppose — the counter-productive attack on Libya. It only sidetracked America from its real responsibility of waging peace in the Mideast. To do so effectively, the U.S. cannot — it must not — become a party to the region's tribal wars.

10 The Toronto Sun, Wednesday May 21, 1986

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RE "AMERICA mired in Mideast mess," May 11: As a daily *Sun* reader, I enjoy Eric Margolis' articles the best. They are the most accurate ones regarding historical and current events. Eric, please continue with your excellent reports which are informative to all your readers.

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