

**ERIC
MARGOLIS**



Backlash at U.S. interests

The bombs that rocked Kuwait yesterday morning may only be the beginning of a widening campaign of violence against American interests in the Middle East. This response to last week's U.S. air strikes in Lebanon and the new American-Israeli military alliance has come swiftly and savagely.

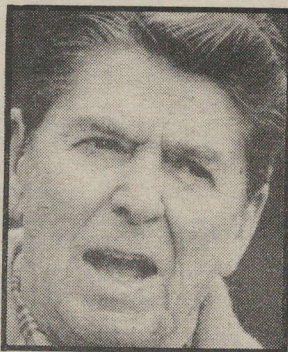
Responsibility for these latest car and truck bomb attacks in Kuwait against the embassies of the U.S. and France, as well as the airport, American housing and an oil installation, has been claimed by the shadowy Islamic Jihad (Holy War) movement.

This Shiite group that is closely allied to Iran also claimed credit for the bombing of U.S. and French military headquarters in Beirut and Israel's headquarters in Tyre. While the West brands this group as terrorists, its members are said to consider themselves holy warriors in the struggle to free Lebanon and the entire Middle East from American and Israeli influence.

How can the U.S. respond to this latest attack? Its range of options against Iran are severely limited. Air attacks against Iranian ports or air bases will do nothing to change Tehran's policy and may result in some form of Soviet intervention.

The attack in Kuwait starkly defines the growing debacle of current U.S. Middle East policy. The Reagan administration blundered into the midst of the Lebanese civil war through sheer ignorance. Trapped in Lebanon and facing mounting casualties in an approaching election year, the administration desperately sought a way out of this mess by ostentatiously forging an alliance with Israel aimed at a possible attack on Syria. Attacks on Syrian troops in Lebanon by U.S. naval units and warplanes underscored this new alliance and the belief among many Middle Easterners that the U.S. is their real enemy.

This view was only solidified by the administration's first act upon conclusion of the alliance with Israel—resumption of deliveries of cluster bombs. These deadly weapons, capable of showering thousands of metal fragments over a wide area, had been embargoed by the U.S. after Israel used them against civilian targets in Lebanon. News of renewed deliveries of these weapons by the U.S. to Israel was greeted across the Middle East by outrage.



RONALD REAGAN
Options limited

To Westerners, car and truck bombs may be terrorist weapons, but to some Middle Easterners they are the poor man's only means of responding to the overwhelming technological superiority of their U.S. and Israeli foes. To merely describe recent attacks as examples of amorphous, random terrorism ignores the dangerous reality of the manifestly growing hatred towards the U.S. across the entire Middle East.

Thanks to its blundering in Lebanon, the U.S. is now facing the worst possible confluence of crises. American attacks on Syria and the Lebanese Muslim forces have galvanized anti-U.S. opinion in the area and made the U.S. an open combatant. Iran, still seething with hatred for the U.S. and bent on expunging American influence in the Middle East, has found the U.S. Marines in Beirut a welcome target.

Iran's four-year old war with Iraq and its threat to close the Strait of Hormuz — the West's oil lifeline — have now merged into the Lebanese war, creating an accelerating crisis of infinite danger. Even worse, the attack in Kuwait on an oil installation may be the harbinger of a campaign of sabotage against the vulnerable petroleum pipelines, pumping stations, refineries and terminals in Arabia.

What we are now seeing may be the beginning of a widespread guerrilla war by Iran and some Arab groups against U.S. economic and political interests throughout the troubled area. While Israel is relatively secure, pro-U.S. Arab regimes and American strategic interests in the Middle East are extremely vulnerable. And, for once, the Reagan administration cannot blame this latest crisis on the Soviets. Its enemies are the Iranians and Arabs who have been turned into bitter foes of the U.S. by the last 25 years of American policy in the Middle East.