

The Sunday Sun, July 7, 1985

One man's terrorist another's patriot

The West, led by President Ronald Reagan, has declared war on terrorism. It is, we are assured, to be rooted out at its source. Terrorists will be punished. Fine so far, but consider these two examples:

● A truck, laden with dynamite, crashes into an army barracks, explodes and kills 32 soldiers and civilians within. Terrorists have struck again. Here was a chilling replica of the 1983 terrorist bombing of U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut.

The attack occurred last year in Huambo, Angola. The soldiers and civilians in the barracks were Cubans who had been invited in by the Marxist regime of Angola to help protect it. The attackers were CIA-supported guerrillas of UNITA, the anti-communist group fighting to overthrow the Angolan government.

Washington had nothing at all to say about this incident. But why was this attack any less an act of terror than the one in Beirut?

● Last week South African commandos struck at Gaborone, Botswana. Their target: Members of the African National Congress who had just staged terrorist bomb and grenade attacks inside South Africa. The U.S. condemned the attack and withdrew its ambassador.

The South Africans were doing precisely what President Reagan has threatened to do: "Strike back at terrorism." Why is a terrorist who throws a grenade at a bus in South Africa any less of a terrorist than one who throws a bomb in Beirut or Athens?

These two incidents offer a disturbing counterpoint to current fashionable thinking. We have been led increasingly to believe that terrorism is a specific,



ERIC MARGOLIS

organized evil directed only against western targets and interests.

Accordingly, it follows that anyone who uses force to oppose our western "interests," whatever or wherever they may be, becomes *ipso facto* a terrorist.

Special commando squads are being readied to "take out" (i.e. kill) potential terrorists. U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz has even gone so far as to say "too bad" if any innocent people are killed in the process — a small irony since terrorists say precisely the same thing. In short, the West reserves the right to pre-empt or avenge terror attacks. Public opinion generally approves this policy.

But what about Huambo? If we can strike against terrorists in Beirut, why can't the Soviets or Cubans attack UNITA bases or their supply lines into South Africa? The Soviets call Afghan freedom fighters "terrorists." Does use of this term then give Moscow the right to bomb Pakistan or for that matter Washington, supplier of \$250 million in arms to the guerrillas? Is the regime of Amin Gemayel in Lebanon any more legitimate or popular than that of the Afghan Quisling, Barak Karmel?

South Africa is a legally recognized government.

Does it not have the right to riposte against terror attacks? Apparently not, according to Washington's view. But if killing of innocents by terrorists in South Africa is not terrorism — call it national liberation — then we must conclude that only some terror acts are terrorism. And this means attacks against western interests.

Suppose the Soviet Union adopts our current western policy. American machinations against the government of Nicaragua are terrorism, claims Moscow. The USSR will attack U.S. bases in Honduras being used to supply contra forces. KGB agents will assassinate contra leaders in Miami. This may sound preposterous, but it's the other side of the counter-terrorist coin. Who came down from Mt. Sinai and said only Washington could shoot terrorists?

The point here is that our western governments have misused very real concerns over terror attacks and transformed them into a powerful new propaganda weapon against our opponents and enemies. Taken to its logical conclusion, Shultz's policy of "pre-empting terrorism" means that hit teams can go out and kill just about anyone that we brand a terrorist.

To much of the rest of the world, our current ballyhooing about anti-terrorism smacks very much of a new method for justifying intervention and violence against people we don't like — particularly when we studiously ignore terror attacks against our enemies. Once our campaign against terrorism becomes a useful propaganda tool in our rivalry with the Soviets, it will become increasingly less effective against the real danger of rising international violence.