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The 1986 U.S. Airstrikes on Libya: A Prototype for Future Military Action Against Terrorism?

by

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Lieutenant Commander U.S. Navy

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satifaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: Charles R. Marineau Jr.

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ABSTRACT of

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U.S. military force against terrorism was first used almost two years ago with the joint U.S. Navy and Air Force airstrike against Libya in April, 1986. In spite of the reduction in Libyan sponsored terrorism since then, it is still unclear whether the airstrikes had a direct effect upon Libya's will to conduct further terrorist actions against the United States. This paper looks at the motivations of terrorists and evaluates the effects of military action upon their will and means to use terrorism and concludes that military action may not have any deterrent effect. Potential gains and risks are evaluated to determine what factors made Operation Eldorado Canyon successful and can be applied to other situations where states are conducting terrorism against the United States. It concludes that other states present more difficult political and military problems that could make a Libya-type raid less likely to be chosen as a response option. Keywords: Military policy, Counterterrorism, Terrorist, Airstrikes, Military response

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PREFACE

This paper was written because of my personal interest in the use of military force against international terrorism. Some of the views and conclusions of this paper are based upon my own personal experiences with the U.S. airstrikes against Libya in 1986, and numerous other terrorist associated events, such as the Achille Lauro hijacking, the interception of the Egyptian airliner with Muhammed Abbas and his PLF terrorists by USS Saratoga F-14's, the Rome and Vienna massacres, and others.

From 1985 through 1987, I served as an intelligence officer on the Staff, Commander Sixth Fleet and was intimately involved in the planning and execution of Operation Eldorado Canyon--the joint U.S. Navy and Air Force airstrikes against five Libyan terrorist associated targets. Additionally, I was the principal terrorist advisor for VADM Frank B. Kelso during that period and developed an in-depth knowledge of Middle Eastern terrorist organizations and methods. Following 1986, it was my role to advise every carrier battle group deploying to the Mediterranean concerning contingency preparations for possible future military operations against terrorism.

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Chapter One

Introduction

On April 15, 1986, the United States conducted Operation Eldorado Canyon, a joint airstrike involving U.S. Navy and Air Force bombers against targets within Libya as a result of the Libyan planned and executed attack against the "La Belle" disco in Berlin, in which an American soldier was killed, and numerous others wounded. The airstrike occurred after the United States was unsuccessful in preventing Libyan terrorism through unilateral and multilateral diplomatic and economic sanctions against the regime of Libyan Leader Muammar Qadhafi. The blow to Libya with significant conventional military force was conducted in order to deter Qadhafi from supporting or directly perpetrating terrorist attacks against American citizens in the future. It has been almost two years since the 1986 attack and no similar attacks by the United States against states sponsoring terrorism have been conducted. It seems appropriate then to look back at the attack and see if the Eldorado Canyon operation was a unique event in American policy making or if it provides a model for future American responses to acts of international terrorism.

An examination of the nature of terrorism, international and otherwise, suggests that the attack on Libya may not a prototype example for the use of military

force against all types of terrorism, but, may be narrowly applicable to situations involving state terrorism or state-supported terrorism. The relative ease with which Libya was identified as the responsible party in the disco bombing was fortuitous and not characteristic of other terrorist events. The nature of the various terrorist actors and their support groups makes pinpointing responsibility difficult to achieve. Conflicting and competing claims, the covert nature of terrorist groups, the web of legitimate support behind many terrorists, the lack of reliable and accurate intelligence, and sensitive political considerations create a veil through which policy makers find it difficult to see clearly and act. Even if the responsible party is known with certainty, there is a low probability that conventional military force alone can either force the terrorist to stop his activity or destroy his means to execute terrorism.

The airstrikes on Libya demonstrated that various political gains and risks must be weighed carefully in advance if the military action is to be successful. The potential gains in credibility, overcoming 'impotence,' demonstrating U.S. power, and achieving concerted action against terrorism must be weighed carefully against the risks of escalation, potential damage to friends and alliances, and the effects on international law and potential for precedent setting. The risks to aircrews, innocent civilians, and the domestic political consensus

are additional concerns.

The airstrikes against Libya, on balance, were indirectly successful in accomplishing the mission of deterring terrorism while avoiding significant ill effects, but should not be used as an example for future military responses to terrorist acts, except where the circumstances are reasonably similar to those on April 15, 1986. With Libya as a target, potential negative factors were minimized or nonexistent resulting in a successful political-military operation. In other circumstances, the results are likely to be otherwise.

Chapter II addresses the underlying assumptions concerning the use of military force against terrorism, showing examples from the experiences of both the U.S. and Israel. Chapter III will examine the potential gains and risks that must be evaluated if a military force option against terrorism is being considered. Chapter IV will discuss the conclusions.

Chapter II

Countering Terrorism With Military Force

Identifying Terrorism and Terrorists

In attempting to deal with terrorism through military force, it is critical to know and understand that there are many forms of terrorism, but that military action is most appropriate for only one: state sponsored terrorism. The U.S. State Department defines terrorism as follows:[1]

> Terrorism is premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine state agents, usually intended to influence an audience.
>
> International terrorism is terrorism involving citizens or territory of more than one country.

This definition is too broad to be useful in identifying what forms of terrorism are appropriate targets for a conventional military response. Alex Schmid has identified seven forms of terrorism[2] that show the multidimensional nature of 'terrorism:'

* Vigilante terrorism: terror used by non-state groups to defend the status quo, such as the death squads in El Salvador.

* Non-communist state terrorism: terror used by states against their own people to effect obedience, such as in Chile.

* Right-wing non-state terrorism: terror used to promote right wing causes, such as neo-Nazi or 'skinhead' violence in the U.S or Germany.

* Ethnic/Nationalist terrorism: terror used against

the legitimate government by ethnic or independence movements, such as the Basque ETA, Irish Republican Army (IRA), or the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO).

* Communist state terrorism: terror used by communist states against their own people to effect obedience, such as the Stalin purges.

* Left-wing terrorism: anti-imperialist/anti-western terrorism, such as by the Red Brigades in Italy or Red Army Faction in West Germany.

Additional categories of religious terrorism and state sponsored terrorism can be added to this list. Religious terrorism would apply to actions by fundamentalist religious groups against legitimate governments, such as the Moslem Brotherhood in Syria, or Islamic Jihad in Egypt. State sponsored terrorism applies to actions by states against other states that employ the means of terrorism in lieu of overt warfare to pursue policy goals at a lower risk level than acceptable in war. This would apply to actions such as the 1983 bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut by the Iranian sponsored Islamic Jihad or the Berlin disco bombing by the Libyan sponsored Abu Nidal.

A cursory review of the above terrorism categories reveals that only state sponsored terrorism, using surrogates or state agents, would be an appropriate target for U.S. conventional military action. In the other categories, the use of U.S. military force is

inappropriate due to matters of sovereignty, jurisdiction, or because the United States is not a direct target of that form of terrorism. For example, Italian sovereignty outweighed U.S. interests in recovering General Dozier after his kidnapping by the Red Brigade. Jurisdiction over responses to terrorism in the United States is held by the FBI or local police authorities. In many terrorist events, American citizens are inadvertent victims and not direct targets. Another factor to consider is proportionality. It would be inappropriate for the United States to take overt military action against non-state targets, such as an individual terrorist or small terrorist group. Such action would be interpreted as "bullying," an image the United States does not desire to portray.

Identifying The Responsible Party.

If military action is contemplated against a state employing terrorist means against the United States, then it is imperative that the responsible agent or state sponsor be identified as clearly as possible. In the case of the Berlin bombing, a fortuitous intercept of a Libyan diplomatic cable made that possible. In future terrorist events, it can not be counted upon to occur again.

Claims of responsibility are one means to link terrorists to their actions. Far from desiring to avoid recognition for their heinous acts, terrorist groups desire, indeed require, publicity to meet their own

internal requirements for legitimacy and to demonstrate their effectiveness. Therefore, they are quick to identify themselves with their actions. Unfortunately, others are, too. After the massacres at the Vienna and Rome airports on December 27, 1985, three terrorist groups claimed responsibility: Abu Nidal, the Martyrs of Palestine, and the Arab Guerilla Cells.[3] Sorting out claims and counterclaims is not often possible unless a cooperative terrorist has been captured in the act.

Linking Terrorists With States.

Even if a terrorist is captured, linking him (or her) to a state sponsor is difficult due to the web of support for terrorist groups that exist in the Arab and communist worlds. Most Arab countries support Palestinian refugee groups, such as the PLO, that are affiliated with terrorism. Radical Arab states such as Iraq, Syria, Libya, Algeria, and South Yemen also provide direct support to the Palestinian terrorist subgroups.[4] It is not often possible to separate financial and moral support for non-terrorist Palestinian institutions from direct aid to terrorist organizations within the Palestinian quasi-governmental structure. It is even more difficult to distinguish "normal" training and financial support from situations when the states provide direction, targeting, and logistical assistance for a particular terrorist act. Finally, most terrorist groups have multiple sponsors, creating confusion over which sponsor

is involved in a particular terrorist event. For instance, the Abu Nidal group is supported by Libya, but had its headquarters in Damascus when it conducted the massacres at Rome and Vienna in 1985. It could not be determined, however, if Abu Nidal was operating on its own, or had direction and support from Libya, Syria, or both.

The Intelligence Problem

The difficulty in clearly identifying a responsible state for an act of terrorism largely results from a lack of intelligence, particularly human intelligence or HUMINT. Terrorist groups, by their very nature, are covert, secretive, and tightly knit cabals that are not easily penetrated by clandestine agents who could provide warnings of impending acts or lay blame after the fact. In recent years, Middle Eastern terrorists have improved their trade craft, becoming more security conscious.[8] Individuals that try to provide information on terrorist groups must be treated with suspicion. If they are close enough to the terrorists to know, then the information may be intentionally deceptive to increase the group's potential for operational success. If the informant is not part of a terrorist group, then the information may be inaccurate or deliberately falsified by the informant in the hope of financial gain.

Part of the problem of unreliable informants within the U.S. HUMINT system resulted from the decimation of

CIA agent networks in the 1970's by the U.S. Congress. The loss of long established agent networks, especially in the Middle East, was grievous and can not be rectified quickly.[6] Although steps were taken under CIA Director William Casey to improve human intelligence collection and analysis, it is expected to take at least a generation to regain what was lost.[7]

Will An Attack Occur?

Even if a responsible state is positively identified, the information may not lead to a military action, even if all nonmilitary measures have been unsuccessful in deterring that state from further terrorism. Some states involved in terrorist support are friendly to the U.S., important partners in U.S. policies, or formidable opponents. It is unlikely U.S. military action would occur against Saudi Arabia, or Egypt, both strong supporters of the PLO, but also important partners of the U.S. in the Middle East peace process. Although Iraq presently provides succor to Muhammed Abbas, the leader of the group which killed Leon Klinghoffer on the Achille Lauro, the U.S. is dependent upon Iraqi cooperation to offset Iranian threats to the other Persian Gulf states. Finally, attacks against Syria and Iran (or the Soviet Union) are less likely due to their superior military defenses, the possibility of undesired escalation, or the possible catastrophic effect such attacks could have on 10 U.S. hostages held in Lebanon by pro-Iranian terrorist

groups. Based on this analysis, it is possible to see the April 1986 strikes against Libya in a different light. Not only was Libya the most visible participant in terrorism at that time, it was also the easiest target from the standpoint of both political and military risk. Because of Libya's support to terrorism in Europe and attempts at undermining her neighbors of Egypt, Chad, and Tunisia, Qadhafi was isolated politically within the European and Arab world and could expect little support from outside. During previous encounters with U.S. military forces, the Libyan military had proven inadequate. These factors made Libya a low risk target for military action. It is hard to identify other states at which U.S. military action could be focused with such low political or military risk.

Attacking The Terrorists Will and Means: Does It Work?

If military action is contemplated against a state sponsoring terrorism, then it must be used to either reduce the terrorist's will to continue his crimes or eliminate his means to plan and execute a terrorist attack. The strikes on Libya were intended to force Qadhafi to pay a price for his terrorist actions and, with the implicit threat of further retaliation, weaken his will to conduct terrorism in the future. A critical assumption in employing military force to weaken a terrorist's will is that the threat or actual use of force is sufficient to make the terrorist group or state desist.

Some terrorism experts believe that the strongest deterrent is a government's demonstrated will and ability to capture and kill terrorists and destroy their organizations.[8] A good example is the Italian Red Brigade, which was decimated by the Italian Carabinieri during and following the search for U.S. General Dozier in 1981.

The Dozier case may be misleading since the terrorists were operating within the state which took the military action. When an examination is made of the motivations of terrorists and the use of military force by Israel and the United States against terrorist groups outside their borders, it appears that military actions such as Eldorado Canyon can not have the same deterrent effect. Psychological profiles of terrorists indicate that military reprisal operations have little effect on their willingness to conduct further terrorism. This is based on the self-image the terrorist has of himself that permits him to conduct acts that are otherwise morally unjustifiable. Most terrorists see themselves as victims of 'imperialist, bourgeoisie, capitalist' governments or regimes.[9] Military attacks by the U.S. can reinforce this self-image of victim since the U.S. is considered the leading and most powerful symbol of the imperialist world by radical, leftist, and communist groups.[10] Many terrorists see themselves in a sacrificial role for their cause.[10] To the suicide terrorist, the threat of death by

military action has little deterrent effect. Many terrorist groups have a soldier image, organizing into 'armies, brigades or commando cells,' such as the Irish Republican Army, or Red Army Faction.[11] This military outlook, with its anticipation of war, may be reinforced by overt military action, which can legitimize their terrorist actions as part of a 'real war.' Exposure to danger increases the solidarity of terrorist organizations.[12] Also, the available evidence seems to indicate that terrorists may not think in rational terms of costs and benefits.[13] If so, a military action that intends to inflict 'unacceptable costs' on terrorist may be misdirected and therefore totally ineffective.

The Israeli experience with Palestinian terrorism appears to bear this out. Evidence from an analysis of retribution raids by Israel against Palestinian targets indicates military action may not be a successful deterrent when measured in terms of changes in the level of terrorist activity.[14] On two occasions, the Israeli military has managed to largely destroy the PLO's main military and political infrastructure with no discernible effect on the PLO's willingness and ability to use terror against Israeli targets. From 1968-70, Israel pounded PLO bases in Jordan, contributing to the PLO expulsion from Jordanian territory and disruption of its organizational structure. In spite of this disruption, and perhaps because of it, the 1970's became the most intense period

of Palestinian terrorism directed against Israel, highlighted by the 1972 Munich Olympics massacre. In 1982, the massive Israeli military invasion into southern Lebanon inflicted the almost complete destruction of the PLO's political and military infrastructure with the result that the PLO was scattered in exile to many different Arab states. After a period of lull, by 1985 the PLO was again able to mount serious terrorist actions against Israeli targets. During the first nine months of 1985, the PLO conducted 38 attacks on Israel or Israelis in Europe, more than double the number of 1984.[16]

Military reprisals can also act to escalate the use of terrorism. Following the September, 1985 PLO attack in Larnaca, Cyprus where three Israeli's were killed, the Israeli Air Force conducted a 1,500 mile raid against the PLO headquarters building in Tunis. The Israeli government claimed the raid was in reprisal for Larnaca. The PLO was not deterred; Yasir Arafat proclaimed that "My people will respond to this official act of terrorism and to the Israeli military junta."[16] In December, massacres occurred at the El Al check-in counters in Rome and Vienna. A note on the one terrorist captured alive in Rome said that the attack was in retaliation for the Tunis bombing.[17] This case of attack and reply is characteristic of many Palestinian and Israeli interactions[18] and demonstrates that military attacks can have the opposite effect from deterrence.

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The airstrikes on Libya are unlike the Israeli-PLO case in that the military attacks were state against state. However, the attack and reply sequence can be shown. The Berlin disco bombing may have been Libyan retaliation for the sinking of their two missile patrol boats in March 1985 by U.S. naval forces conducting freedom of navigation operations in the Gulf of Sidre. Although there is no evidence that this was the case, the disco bombing was very uncharacteristic of Libyan terrorism since Qadhafi had previously focused on assassinating Libyan dissidents in Europe; it was the first time that Qadhafi had ever directly targeted Americans. After the April 15th airstrikes, a number of cases of Libyan terrorism occurred which were directly linked to the U.S. military action. On April 17, two days after the airstrike, two British and one American hostage in Lebanon were killed by their captors. A note on one of the bodies said the killing was in retaliation for the U.S. airstrikes. Britain claimed to have firm evidence of Libyan involvement in the killings.[19] Also on April 17, the communications officer at the U.S. Embassy in Khartoum, Sudan was shot in the head and seriously wounded. Libyan operatives in Sudan were believed to be responsible for the attempted assassination.[20] On April 19, four Libyan terrorists were captured by Turkish police officers in Ankara as they attempted to bomb the U.S. Armed Forces officers club using techniques very similar

to those used against the disco in Berlin.[21] Meanwhile, bomb threats were received by U.S. airline, government, and military installations around the world by groups sympathetic to Libya.[22] These events do not show a state cowed into submission by a superior military threat, although they may have been the unreasoned lashing out of a wounded 'mad dog' prior to a sober reassessment of the situation. At the very least, these events show that the airstrikes did not have any immediate effect on Libya's willingness and ability to conduct further terrorism against the United States. The long term result, however, has been an apparent end to Libyan terrorism directed against the U.S. The real question is did this drop result from the physical effects of the airstrikes or from indirect effects that were triggered by the airstrikes.

Chapter III

MILITARY RESPONSES TO TERRORISM: GAINS AND RISKS.

It has been shown that immediate and direct effects on terrorist will may not occur as a result of the physical effects of conventional military action, such as Operation Eldorado Canyon. And yet, since 1986, it is clear that the overall level of international terrorism directed against the United States has lessened. An examination of the aftermath of the Libya strikes will show that the results were largely political in nature.

Image Enhancement.

First, the strike served to demonstrate U.S. will and overcame the sense of impotence that characterized the American policy making process since the capture of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran in 1979. It served to remind terrorist states of U.S. power and reach that had been tarnished by the failure of the U.S. airstrike in Lebanon in 1983 when two aircraft were shot down and an American aircrewman was captured. However, these results, while important, were not sufficient by themselves to deter acts against the U.S. by state sponsored terrorists. More careful planning and security consciousness by terrorists to obscure their connection to a terrorist event would seem sufficient to avoid additional American retribution.

Collective Action.

The most effective, albeit indirect, result of the strike on Libya was that the event finally coalesced

anti-terrorist action among U.S. allies and friends, leading to a real improvement in collective security against terrorism. The Libya strike was primarily an action of last resort when it appeared that the European allies would not take the forceful actions proposed by the United States to isolate Libya diplomatically and economically, while enhancing collective security arrangements against further acts of terrorism by Libyan diplomatic personnel in Europe. Although the European Community Foreign Ministers had met on April 14th and had agreed to reduce the Libyan presence at their 'People's Bureaus' in Europe, after the airstrike more forceful measures were discussed.[23] Within days, these measures were approved, including further reductions in the Libyan diplomatic presence, strict visa requirements for Libyan travellers, and the restriction of movement by Libyans in Europe.[24] Italy, because of the Libyan missile attack against Lampedusa Island, was especially severe with Tripoli, cutting the total Libyan presence in Italy, diplomatic or otherwise, in half.[25] It was clear afterwards that it had taken the U.S. unilateral military action to bestir the allies to take effective action against terrorism, resulting in improved police and intelligence cooperation, the expulsion of numerous personnel associated with terrorism, and the capture of many terrorists.[26] The collective European action against Qadhafi should be seen as the key factor in the lessening

of Libyan terrorism since it greatly reduced the Libyan terrorist infrastructure that was operating out of the "Peoples Bureau's." However, it was not accomplished without political costs.

Risks and Consequences.

Operation Eldorado Canyon involved some risks that were foreseen, but many that were not. These risks, when weighed against the anticipated gains, make military action against terrorism in the future a dicey proposition. These risks include the potential for escalation, the potential damage to friends and undermining of alliance cohesiveness, the undermining of international laws, undesired precedent setting, the potential damage from the capture of a downed aircrew, the negative effect of injury to innocent civilians, and domestic political factors.

Escalation Risk. Operation Eldorado Canyon was a unilateral action by the United States, with Great Britain permitting USAF F-111 aircraft to originate from English territory. Yet, the conflict suddenly expanded to include Italy. On April 15, 1986, Libya fired two Scud surface-to-surface missiles at the U.S. Coast Guard Loran station on the Italian island of Lampedusa, but did not hit the station.[27] In response, Italian military forces were put on alert and Italian Prime Minister Craxi promised a military response to any further Libyan action against Italian territory.[28] Italy founded herself

without warning on the brink of war with Libya, a situation undesirable to Rome since Libya is a major source of oil and economic investment for Italy.

The possibility of escalation is difficult to foresee, but must be considered since the consequences can be dramatic, as the Israeli experience bears out. Israeli reprisal operations against Palestinian terrorists in Egypt and Jordan in 1966-67 created a very belligerent Arab mood, which was a major factor in the outbreak of the Six Day War.[33] Afterwards, anti-Israeli terrorism continued and expanded unabated.[34] The escalation into war and continued terrorism was apparently not anticipated and could not have been desired by the Israeli leadership as a result of their anti-terrorist actions. Any future efforts by the United States to use military force against states employing terrorism must keep the risk of unintended escalation clearly in sight.

Effect On Allies. In dealing with terrorist states, the interests of allies must be carefully considered before any U.S. action. Eldorado Canyon was potentially damaging to many European states because of the close economic and political links they had with Libya. Libya was an important source of oil and economic investment for Italy and Germany, two states that afterwards opposed the action.[35] Also, the allies were unintentionally hurt economically when American tourism to Europe dropped dramatically after the airstrike due to fears of increased

terrorism resulting from the attack.[32]

The potential undermining of allied cohesiveness was a greater concern than economic loss. Of all the European allies, only the Thatcher government officially supported the strike; even British public opinion was opposed--66 percent thought the attack was wrong.[33] France and Spain did not support the attack and were severely criticized in the U.S. for not permitting the F-111's to fly a shorter route to Libya over their territory, a criticism Paris and Madrid strongly resented.[34] Other European states were angry at the U.S. for many reasons: they were not informed of the raid in advance, they feared exposure to terrorist reprisals, they felt that the European anti-Libyan measures taken on April 14th were being ignored, and believed the attack strengthened Qadhafi's stature at home and abroad.[35] The image of Americans fearfully cancelling trips to Europe reinforced the impression that the U.S. action was ill advised. Although subsequent allied action against terrorism supported the U.S., it appeared to be done as much to prevent further unilateral U.S. actions as to prevent terrorism. In all, the Libya raid strained allied relations and a created a general feeling that the U.S. was running roughshod over European concerns. In the long term, this feeling was overcome when the allies acknowledged the requirement for collective action against Libya.

Legal Ramifications and Precedent Setting. Military

action against terrorism may send confusing political signals concerning United States respect for international law and approved norms of behavior between states. In one case, the Israeli rescue raid at Entebbe, the U.S. supported the violation of Ugandan sovereignty by Israel as a means of self-defense only because there were "exceptional and unique circumstances," i.e., Uganda was directly involved.[36] However, after the October 1985 Israeli airstrike against PLO headquarters in Tunis, mixed signals came out of Washington. Initially, the U.S. favored the Israeli action as a legitimate response to terrorist actions.[37] Upon consideration, the U.S. shifted back to the position, consistent with that of the United Nations, that the action created a pattern of escalation and could not be condoned.[38] The fact that the attack occurred within the territory of friendly Tunisia and that the United States had encouraged Tunisia to allow the PLO to move to Tunis contributed to the change in policy.

After Eldorado Canyon, an action with many similarities with the Tunis strike, the U.S. claimed that the action was permissible under Article 51 of the U.N. Charter concerning the right of self-defense by states. While there are significant differences between the Tunis and Libya attacks, this apparent inconsistency in position by the U.S. serves to undermine the authority of the U.N. and weaken the position of the U.S. as a supporter of international law. Another effect would be to legitimize

actions by other states to violate a state's territorial integrity to attack 'terrorists;' it is simple to imagine Nicaragua attacking Contra bases in Honduras or Vietnam attacking refugee camps in Thailand under such auspices.

A similar situation existed over the U.S. action in October, 1985 to divert an Egyptian airliner with the Achille Lauro hijackers on board with F-14 aircraft from an aircraft carrier in the Mediterranean. In August, 1973, the Israeli Air Force intercepted a Middle East Airlines jet mistakenly believed to be carrying George Habash, the leader of the Palestinian Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and forced it to land in Israel.[39] This act was condemned in U.N. Security Council Resolution 337 and ICAO Council Resolution of August 20, 1973.[40] The U.S. act was not substantively different from the Israeli action, yet the Egyptian airliner diversion was portrayed as a legal act. However, it does not appear consistent with the Hague, Montreal, or Tokyo Conventions, or various U.N. resolutions, concerning the hijacking or diversion of aircraft conducting flight in national or international airspace.[41] Under the Tokyo Convention, the aircraft commander may deliver a person who has committed an offense to the authorities; however, duress can not be imposed to make him do so. In the U.S. action, questions concerning the use of duress by the F-14 interceptors to force the airliner to land at Sigonella have been implied, but not confirmed. Even so, a bad

precedent may have been set, permitting states to interfere with international air travel to apprehend anyone they label terrorists and/or criminals.

The use of military force in any situation to resolve differences between states will raise questions of legality, such as raised over Eldorado Canyon and the Egyptian airliner diversion. In deciding upon the military option, the gain from the military action must be greater than the long term legal consequences.

Risks to Aircrews and Mission. In addition to the external political and legal risks resulting from military action against terrorism, a major risk to mission success is inherent in the choice of an air strike. Since aircraft must fly over hostile territory to strike at terrorist bases, the loss of an aircraft and capture of the aircrew could have a disastrous effect on the outcome. Since the airstrike is largely intended to have a political and psychological impact, the capture of an aircrewman and the image of him being paraded, beaten, or humiliated by his captors could offset any anticipated gains. For instance, the image of Lt. Robert Goodman in the hands of his Syrian captors did much to reinforce the image of American failure after the ill-fated carrier air attack in Lebanon in 1983.[42] During Eldorado Canyon an F-111 was lost, but its loss could not be used for political purposes since no wreckage or bodies were recovered. Airstrikes into more heavily defended areas,

such as Syria, may run too high a risk of aircraft loss and crew capture to use as a terrorist response option.

Targeting and Indiscriminate Effects. Another risk in the airstrike option is the potential for the United States to be perceived as indiscriminate and insensitive in its targeting. In spite of technological improvements in navigational equipment and weapons accuracy, the ability of modern aircraft to drop conventional bombs precisely is not perfect. Talk of "surgical strikes" and use of smart ordnance against terrorist targets only exacerbates the false image that pinpoint targeting is easy or always possible. Delivering any type of ordnance on target at high speed and low altitude, at night, and into a city environment, as was required during Eldorado Canyon, is problematic at best. The results were clear in Tripoli and Benghazi--collateral damage to civilian areas and innocent people killed, in spite of rules of engagement and tactics procedures by the U.S. government and aircrews to avoid it.[43] On balance, the collateral damage in Libya had little negative impact upon the political results of the attack, but the potential was there. One has only to examine the results of Israeli airstrikes into southern Lebanon where Palestinian and Lebanese civilians are frequently hit. The negative consequences of this indiscriminate targeting include increased determination by terrorist groups to retaliate and international condemnation for the killing of

civilians.

Domestic Considerations. The domestic effects of Operation Eldorado Canyon were very positive, with 77 percent of the U.S. population supporting the attack.[44] Yet, at the same time, 44 percent thought it would lead to more terrorism![43] While this largely explains the American reluctance to travel to Europe afterwards, it surely complicated any attempts to justify the attack on the grounds that it would deter terrorism and make international travel safer for Americans.

Within Congressional circles, the Libya attack was largely supported by both parties, with some dissent from the Democratic leadership. They complained that they were not consulted, a few warned of the risk of escalation, some felt the action violated the 1973 War Powers Act, and others believed it set a bad precedent concerning Presidential use of military force.[46] In spite of these criticisms, it was obvious that the overall Congressional support for Eldorado Canyon helped the administration present a unified front in the face of European and United Nations opposition. This support was possible because other means of resolving the conflict with Libya had been exhausted unsuccessfully, there was positive proof of Qadhafi's responsibility for the Berlin disco bombing, and the attack was considered an appropriate and proportionate response to the provocation. Future attempts to use military force against terrorism, if they are to be

supported domestically, must have the same elements.

Chapter IV

Conclusions.

Is Operation Eldorado Canyon a prototype for future military operations against terrorism? Probably not; many fortuitous factors were at work in favor of a successiul result in this case. Clear, unambiguous intelligence was available, Libya was an easy target politically and militarily, the allies were already moving the day before the strike toward more substantive actions against Libya, escalation was minimized, losses were low, and domestic factors played a supporting role. The results of the airstrikes were also fortuitous; while the direct physical effects did not appear to be a immediate deterrent to Libya, the resulting allied cohesive action did have a real, long term impact on Libya's willingness and ability to conduct terrorism in Europe.

In other cases, the same results can not be foreseen: it would be difficult to apply Operation Eldorado Canyon to terrorist states such as Syria, Iran, or North Korea. These states are more formidable political and military entities than Libya and are less likely to be deterred by measured applications of force. The indirect effects would also be expected to have a minimal impact since these states are not as closely link to Europe or other U.S. friends as Libya was. Based upon this evaluation, it appears that military force can not be solely relied upon as an effective terrorist response option in future.

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