

# Who Are the 'Terrorists'?

by Murray N. Rothbard

"Terrorism" has been made The Issue of the Year, for which Americans are expected to tighten their belts, pay countless billions in taxes so the U.S. government and its allies can arm to the teeth, and suffer an escalating repression of their liberties.

Yet *who* the terrorists are supposed to be remains vague and shadowy. Their only apparent common characteristic is that they are swarthy and foreign; no Nordics need apply.

The top villains seem to appear and disappear kaleidoscopically. A few years ago it was Colonel Khadafy; remember the sinister, swarthy, and "bearded Libyan hit men" supposedly sent to the U.S. to assassinate President Reagan? For that alleged act a partial embargo was imposed on Libyan trade. Yet, the "hit men" seemed to have vanished into the night, never to be heard from again.

After Khadafy had his day in the sun, the Bulgarian equivalent of the KGB had its time at the top, supposedly having engineered Mehmet Ali Agca's attempt to assassinate Pope John Paul II.

The "Bulgarian connection," so highly touted by conservatives and neo-conservatives in this country, seems to have blown itself away on the sea of lies, contradictions, and lunacies in Agca's testimony. The only sure quantity in Agca and his proven colleagues is that they are right-wing Turks, hardly fitting candidates for the current White House-U.S. Establishment hit list.

After the fading away of the Bulgarian evil empire, the Lebanese Shiites and their alleged mastermind, the Ayatollah Khomeini, had a long run as "Top Terrorist of the Month."

The U.S. Navy had their turn at shelling and destroying Shiite villages in Lebanon, but the Shiites proved a hardy bunch, and the idea of bombing the alleged Shiite training camp headquarters in the Bekaa Valley foundered in the realization that Syria was there, with anti-aircraft rockets, and with Russia and World War III looming in the background.

Then, suddenly, presto chango, and the dread Shiites seem to have disappeared as the top terrorists, to be replaced by... none other than Colonel Khadafy, back from his long rest.

The chain of evidence linking the Colonel to the recent airport bombings is even flimsier than the hysteria over the Khomeini and Bulgaria, and ranks up there with the disappearing Libyan hit men.

The airport bombings "look like the work" of Abu Nidal, head of the militant Palestinian Fatah Revolutionary Council. That takes care of that, even though no one is really sure that Nidal is still alive.

Having established the Nidal responsibility to its satisfaction, the U.S. government then tries to link Khadafy to Nidal. The claims of the White House and the CIA that they have secret evidence should be met with the same contempt as the alleged "secret knowledge" the CIA was supposed to have had on Vietnam. No person or group should be convicted on secret knowledge.

Even the U.S. admits that its evidence against Khadafy "wouldn't stand up in court." But a basic tenet of both libertarian and Anglo-Saxon law is that everyone must be considered innocent until proven guilty; otherwise, retaliation or punishment would itself be open criminal aggression, in fact would be "terrorism." Why doesn't such a standard apply also to Arabs, even if foreign, swarthy, and sometimes even bearded?

In truth, Khadafy is not even charged directly with masterminding or even financing Nidal or other terrorists. He is charged with allowing Nidal to have bases on Libyan territory, with "harboring" terrorists. An interesting charge. (Although even here, there is some evidence that the airport terrorists came from bases in Lebanon, not Libya. But who cares, right, so long as we kill some Arabs, *any* Arabs?) What does it mean?

In New York and other cities of the United States, hundreds of innocent men, women, and children are terrorized every day, in crimes called mugging. Should the United States government carpet-bomb New York City, destroying it for "harboring" terrorists, and for allowing them to use the city as a "base"? But, you might say, that would mean murdering masses of innocents? Sure, so why then is it OK for the United States government to shell Shiite villages, murdering the innocent, or for Israel to bomb Tunisia, killing 61 innocents, or for the United States to bomb Libya?

The U.S. and Israel say that they deplore *having* to kill innocents, but since they feel that they must "retaliate," and they can't pinpoint the actual terrorists – in fact, they don't know where the terrorists are or even *who* they are – therefore, they must do *something*, and killing the innocent becomes a regrettable necessity.

But how does such an argument differ from the U.S. government

carpet-bombing New York City ("We *must* retaliate, and it is regrettable that we have to kill thousands, but we can't pinpoint the SOB's"). Or, for that matter, how does it differ from policemen trying to catch a criminal fleeing into a crowd, and simply machine-gunning the entire crowd?

To bring the case closer to home, there is some evidence that the Air India plane that blew up out of Canada was sabotaged by Sikh terrorists, and that those Sikhs were trained in a CIA training camp in Alabama. Would the Canadian, or Indian, government be justified in a bombing strike against the CIA base in Alabama, even at the regrettable cost of killing a few thousand Alabamans? If not, why not? Isn't Alabama a "harborer" of Sikh terrorists?

Furthermore, every group in this struggle has grounds to believe that *they* are "retaliating": the Arabs believe that they are retaliating against Israeli aggressors and their backers in the United States.

The rule should be absolute: no "retaliation" is ever justified that injures or kills innocent people, and that means people who are not themselves active criminals. Anything else is an apologia for unremitting and unending mass murder; anything else is chaos and old night, and a justification for "anarchy" in the bad sense.

Everyone rightfully scorns Communists for holding a double moral standard, for holding that no acts are immoral so long as they advance their cause. But what about the egregious and flagrant double standard upheld every day by the American establishment: from the White House down to the major political parties and the media? If they did not hold such a double standard, they would be condemning the following flagrant acts of terrorism:

- The CIA mining that damaged several neutral and peaceful vessels in Managua Harbor.
- Acts of brutality by the Nicaraguan *contras*.
- The U.S. government's aggression in an invasion of Grenada.
- The U.S. government's flagrant war threats against Libya.
- Reagan's act of terrorism against U.S. citizens in Libya, by threatening them with jail sentences if they do not leave.

This last act has an interesting twist: these Americans, who have been peacefully let alone by the dread Libyan government, are supposedly being forced to leave Libya by the U.S. for "their own protection."

Struggling to wriggle out of this blatant double standard has been a major project of the favorite theoretician of the conservatives and neo-cons, Mrs. Jeanne Kirkpatrick, she who first made her mark with a sophistic distinction between "authoritarian" torture (good) and "totalitarian" torture (bad). Any sensible treatment of terrorism would define it as "aggression against innocent people."

First, Mrs. Kirkpatrick and her colleagues tried to redefine "terrorism"

as such aggression by *private* groups, thereby letting the U.S. and Israeli governments off the hook.

But then, with escalating hysteria against Khomeini, Khadafy, Bulgaria, etc., the conservatives were forced to include "state-sponsored" or "state" terrorism in their lexicon.

Mrs. Kirkpatrick's latest attempt to justify a double standard is that terrorists are evil because their "demands are unlimited" and random, whereas good guys make demands that are attainable and specific.

While the "unlimited" criterion might apply to the alleged airport bombings by Abu Nidal, they most emphatically do *not* apply to most previous terrorist acts, such as the Achille Lauro hijacking, since they have generally been linked to very specific demands for the release of Arab comrades from Israeli jails. Another sophistic attempt to whitewash U.S. and Israeli terrorist actions thus comes a cropper.

There also is a related double standard at work. So far, every bombing or assassination *abroad* is attributed to "terrorists"; while every similar occurrence *within* the United States – from the average mugging to the assassination of John F. Kennedy – is quickly assigned to the category of "lone nut," or, at the least, non-political.

Why a *political* murder should be considered somehow worse than a lone-nut or non-political one is itself a fascinating question. But the main point is that when a clearly political dynamiting or murder does take place *within* the borders of the United States – an area that the U.S. government should concern itself with far more than events 5000 miles away – no one seems to give much of a damn.

When one American, Leon Klinghoffer, was murdered on a hijacked Italian cruise liner, the New York media did not stop wailing about the deed for a solid month, and New York's egregious Senator D'Amato actually proposed Klinghoffer for the Congressional Medal of Honor.

When one American, Alex Odeh, was murdered by the dynamiting of his Los Angeles office of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination League, few kicked up a fuss. No media wailed day after day, no senator called for the granting to Odeh of the Congressional Medal of Honor. Why is that? Why the double standard?

Why is the murder of one American thousands of miles away treated so very differently from the murder of another right here at home? It would be interesting to see what moral theory Mrs. Kirkpatrick comes up with for *that one*.