

Davis, Brian L. *Qaddafi, Terrorism, and the Origins of the U.S. Attack on Libya*. New York: Praeger, 1990.

The pledges of Saddam Hussein and parts of the Palestinian resistance to resort to terrorism in the event of war in the Gulf have so far not come about. However, no thoughtful analyst, policymaker, or citizen should forget the Iraqi dictator's terrorist threats during the Gulf crisis, which remind us that terrorists and terrorism remain very much alive. This unhappy development adds to the timeliness of Brian Davis's well-researched and pleasingly written study of the anti-terrorist strike by the United States against Qaddafi on 15 April 1986.

Davis has carefully examined the public record and compiled a thorough account of, in his words, "the context of 'Operation El Dorado Canyon.'" (p. vii) Thus Davis set the attack on Libya against a background of the murder of American diplomats and Marines by terrorists in Lebanon in 1983, Qaddafi's patronage of Abu Nidal and his professionals, a rash of airline terrorist acts in 1984, the murder of a crippled American passenger aboard the hijacked *Achille Lauro* in October 1985, and the bloody assaults at Rome's Leonardo da Vinci and Vienna's Schwechat airports in December 1985, which killed 20 and wounded 110 people. Qaddafi praised the murders in public, and the Reagan Administration concluded that the Libyan leader had played an important part in the attacks, through his sponsorship of Abu Nidal who trained the Fatah-Revolutionary Council gunmen, apparently at camps in the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon, and the provision of passports taken by the Libyan government from Tunisian guest workers.

The terrorist attack that triggered the reprisal against Libya was, of course, the bombing of La Belle discotheque in West Berlin early in the morning of 5 April 1986. For his description of the bombing and the decision to strike Libya, Davis carefully assembled the publicly available information and concluded that Libya was responsible. The strident criticism of the American bombing of Tripoli, particularly in Western Europe, made that conclusion controversial. It is no longer. Since Davis published his book, the collapse of Communist governments in East Germany, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia has richly augmented the store of information about Libyan support of terrorism. In July 1990, for example, *Die Welt* published East German intelligence files which established, according to the *New York Times* account, that "East Berlin's highest authorities let a Libyan-Palestinian terrorist group plan and carry out the bombing of a West Berlin Discotheque that killed 2 American servicemen and a Turkish woman and wounded 229 other people." (15 July 1990, p. 5) Based on interviews with Czech officials, Independent Television News (ITN) reported that before 1980 a Czechoslovakian manufacturer sold more than 1,000 tons of the most potent kind of Semtex-H explosive to Libya. In 1984, according to another ITN report, a Czech special operations group conducted tests to determine how much Semtex was needed to bring down an airliner (as little as 200 grams). Pan Am flight 103 was brought down by a small Semtex bomb detonated at 31,000 feet. (Ibid.)

Despite his claim to provide information about the context of Operation EL DORADO CANYON, Davis raised and meant to raise more profound issues. At least three deserve discussion here. They are the strong opposition of West European governments to the use of force against terrorists; the opposition of most regional experts to reprisal against terrorists in particular and a forceful US posture in the Middle East in general; and the enduring conundrum of what works best against terrorists.

Davis believes that West Europeans and regional experts were consistently mistaken. Qaddafi was guilty, not innocent in the La Belle bombing, as the recent evidence confirms, and was responsible for many other terrorist attacks. Nothing but force would stop him despite the views of the Europeans, and the use of force had none of the unpleasant results in the Middle East that were predicted by the regional specialists, such as a rallying to Qaddafi, or a consolidation of Arab opinion against the United States.

But surely the conclusion from this cannot be to disregard the advice of the regionalists or to spurn or weaken the links binding the United States to Western Europe. Of all recent American foreign policy failures, the catastrophically bad US decision to intervene in Lebanon stands out as one of the least informed by regional expertise. Moreover, the cooperation of the strong, capable, democratic governments of Europe is as essential to combatting terrorism as it was to the defeat of Saddam Hussein's attempt to annex Kuwait.

It is therefore difficult, as Davis recognized, to generalize about what will defeat terrorism. There is much to be said for making governments answer for their sponsorship of terrorists, for giving terrorists an address, as the Israelis put it. This was the aim of Operation EL DORADO CANYON. Governments make cost-benefit analyses; they must if they are to survive, and they can be made to choose between the pain of military losses and the pleasure of sponsoring terrorism. Terrorists prosper when they are indulged by government, but they thrive where government is absent or weak. Lebanon, above all other countries, lacks effective, responsible government. There is no government in Lebanon because it suits Israel and Syria to have none, and because the Soviet Union and the United States have declined to oblige their respective allies to establish order there. The single most effective blow that could be struck against terrorism would be for Syria and Israel to restore government in Lebanon. To do this would require them to address the substantive issues that plague the region, issues of security, nuclear, chemical, and conventional arms control and, yes, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. If grievances alone do not explain much less justify terrorism, terrorists rely on grievances to create an aura of psychological and political acceptance of their excesses.

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