

LETTERS

Alexander Haig, Daniel Pipes, John G. McCarthy, Bruce Fein, Ralph Slovenko, Gregory Christiansen, George B.N. Ayittey, Dan Heldman, Howard Jarvis, Mayor William Collins, and others.

Shooting Down Terrorism

Dear Sir:

Jim Courter has performed a signal public service in his superb article ("Protecting Our Citizens: When to Use Force Against Terrorism," Spring 1986). Clearly, other democracies have shown that surprise, speed, and skill can characterize the use of force against terrorists. There is no reason why we cannot do so as well, if we keep before us the following points:

1. The objective is to show the terrorists—and those who facilitate their work—that they will fail to change our policies while paying the heaviest price in the process. It is the terrorists whom we must impress with our actions, not just public opinion.

2. Diplomatic, economic, and moral sanctions have their place, but ultimately there is no substitute for armed self-defense.

3. The risks of military actions are considerable but the risks of doing nothing are cumulatively greater—not just to our citizens and our prestige but ultimately to deterrence itself. If we do not act to defend ourselves and our values, then who else will do so?

4. Our response should be discriminate and proportionate. But

proportionate means the punishment necessary to defeat the terrorists, not a "tit for tat" which leaves to them the choice of escalation.

Above all, as Representative Courter points out, we must not allow the watchwords of morality and prudence to mean paralysis and indecision.

Alexander Haig
Washington, D.C.

Dear Sir:

Representative Courter makes a number of extremely valuable suggestions about responding to terrorism. I should like to add two more.

First, the U.S. government must at times impose military censorship to protect the confidentiality of troop movements and other tactics. This would prevent a repetition of what happened in June 1985, at the time of the T.W.A. hijacking, when the American press reported the departure of the Delta Force for the Middle East. This news was broadcast internationally; the terrorists heard it and decided to flee Algiers (where the government might have allowed U.S. forces to operate) for Beirut (where deploying U.S. forces would be much more difficult).

Second, it is incumbent on American political leaders to explain that

the purpose of using force against terrorists is to punish the perpetrators and establish a principle—not to win the safety of the hostages. Of course, one does everything possible to save the hostages' lives, but the success lies in establishing a record of devastating response which dissuades terrorists from targeting Americans. Conversely, the loss of innocent life does not render the operation a failure. Words are important: the effort should be presented not as a rescue mission but as a counter-terror strike.

Daniel Pipes
Professor of Strategy
Naval War College
Newport, RI

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