Reagan played Rambo in hijacker interception

Not much more than three weeks ago, another hostage drama, the seajacking of the Italian cruise ship "Achille Lauro," had a relatively lucky ending. None of the hostages would be anything now, but there was a surprising conclusion. After the Palace of Hijackers left Egypt for a PLO tribunal in Tunis, the Egyptian Air Force intercepted the Egyptian airplane and forced it to land in Sicily.

Could this have been the motive for the hijacking of the Egyptian civilian airliner? The "Achille Lauro" affair was basically over. Due to the efforts of both Italy and Egypt, all but one of the hostages were released safely. The four Palestinian terrorists as well as PLO Secretary-General Muhammad Abbas were on their way to a PLO tribunal in Tunis where the four hijackers were to be tried.

There is only one possible explanation: tough President Reagan, who had recently lost face in the TWA-crisis, strongly needed some action to touch up his fragile ego. Most Americans seem to simply love a leader who shows the world how "strong" and "firm" the United States is.

Moreover, there was the threat for the blood of terrorists and the disturbing feeling of total helplessness left behind by the TWA-hijacking. An action in "Rambo"-style was just the right thing to generate a new wave of pre-Reaganism and euphoria in the United States.

If the four terrorists had ever reached US territory, they would have had to pay for every terrorist act in the last decade in the name of just vengeance. A fair trial as intended by the Reagan administration would have been a farce — just like the tribunal in Tunis might have been. We should be thankful to Italian Prime Minister Bettino Craxi for having prevented another questionable outcome of American morality and self-righteousness.

Do not misunderstand me: the hijacking of the "Achille Lauro" was a regrettable crime. But this does not give the Reagan administration a title to give lessons in firmness or to take "justice" into its own hands.

In jailing of four Palestinian terrorists at least some semblance in the fight against international terrorism? Definitely not. Terrorism is a disease just as the measles is. There is no sense in trying to get rid of each red spot separately; one should not even scratch them, no matter how much the itch. The right thing to do is to fight the disease at the right place, inside the body.

Terrorism and terrorists are symptoms, indications that there is something wrong somewhere. There is no sense in trying to get rid of each terrorist separately either — the only outcome will be a nasty scar on society's moral skin. To stop terrorism, we must look to its cause and straighten things out; what has to be straightened out in our case is the Middle East situation.

For the time being, let us forget that there are "professional" terrorists — that Palestinian terrorism against innocent American civilians might be, if not justified, at least understandable. To tell US officials to CIA or official US-supported terrorism against innocent Palestinian civilians; that modern mass media are centering on such incidents, indiscriminately provoking international terrorism.

The tension and the surge within NATO countries are increase. International terrorism will seek revenge, one way or another, Israel is taking it chance to deal with Jordan directly, omitting the PLO and prophesying a new era of terror. The bigger the Middle East.

But who wants to have peace in the Middle East? Certainly not Israel, its recent familiar as a state terrorism was bound to throw back all peace efforts years. Certainly not the United States. Its blind support of anyone who has the "Maze in hand" is bound to make all commitments to a peaceful Middle East and the end of PLO terrorism look ridiculous.

Anyway, Reagan is as popular as before, and that is what counts, Right?