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Symposium Reviews Raid on Libya

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Staff Writer

A former high-ranking CIA officer said Monday that if covert actions against Col. Moammar Khadafy had been allowed, they would have yielded better results than the U.S. air raid April 14 in Libya.

Thomas Polgar was one of four former intelligence officers, along with CIA Director William Casey, to address the Fourth National Intelligence Symposium held Monday at the Naples Beach Club Hotel.

The symposium, sponsored by the Naples Daily News and Palmer Communications, was coordinated by the Association of Former Intelligence Officers.

POLGAR TOLD the audience of about 350 former intelligence officers and interested citizens that counterterrorism may call for unconventional responses from the CIA, but he noted that the CIA is not free to handle all situations in the way they see fit.

"The CIA could not kill a known terrorist," Polgar said. The U.S. government will not allow that. Yet the government sends planes to another country to drop bombs that may kill a large number of innocent people — as happened in Libya last month, he said.

There's a saying in Latin America, Polgar said, that if you cut off the snake's head, that's the remedy against the snake.

Polgar said the U.S. raid may end up breeding new terrorism from Libya.

"THE BROTHER or son of those killed in the Libya bombing will remember and come back to haunt us some day," he said.

Polgar said he did not completely disagree with the administration's decision to attack Libya in retaliation for terrorist acts. But he believes covert actions would have yielded better results without creating a personal motivation in the Libyan people to do something against America.

Polgar, a former CIA chief of station in Saigon and Bonn, is a consultant to the Vice President's Task Force on Combating Terrorism. That task force is confronted with the continuing problem of terrorism, with no instant solutions, Polgar said.

Over 50 Islamic terrorist groups exist in the world. And those are just the Islamic groups. Polgar said there are probably more than 100 other terrorist groups with different motivations.

The bad news, Polgar was forced to tell the audience, is that terrorism is not going to go away. There is no instant solution to international terrorism.

"I DON'T think it will be resolved any more than you resolve heart disease, or the common cold," he said. "We must learn to live with terrorism as we learn to live with heart disease."

There has always been terrorism around the world and there always will be, Polgar said. But there are things that can be done to combat it.

He suggested a more disciplined approach to the publicity terrorists receive. "Terrorism feeds on publicity," he said.

Covert actions can also be an important tool for combating terrorism, and less expensive than military force. He suggested that instead of the bombing attack of Libya, a small team of men could have gone into the country and destroyed all the Libyan military planes.

Polgar also said a sound working relationship with other countries is important in the fight against terrorism.

But he stressed that the United States must not go overboard in its reactions to terrorism. The nation's overwhelming fear of terrorism — to the point that European vacations are no longer being considered by many — is a reaction to the publicity and not an accurate reflection of the gravity of the problem, he said.

THE GOVERNMENT may also be in danger of overreacting. There is talk of building fences around the White House, billions of dollars are going toward shoring up American installations around the world.

"The terrorists are succeeding in doing something they have been unable to do before — place physical barriers between our government and the people, just like at the Kremlin," Polgar said.

He stressed that the violence must be placed in perspective. There were over 800 terrorist incidents in the world in 1985 that left 23 Americans dead. But also that year 18,000 Americans were homicide victims and 40,000 died in auto accidents.

If the government permits terrorist acts to be the motivating force of its policy and American individuals and businesses change their lifestyles, then terrorists have accomplished their purpose, Polgar said.

Polgar did draw some murmurs of displeasure from the crowd when he questioned some of America's own policies.

He noted that Britain's Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher took exception with American citizens' financial support of the Irish Republican Army. There is more financial support from the United States to the IRA than Libyan support to terrorists abroad, he said.

"One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter," Polgar noted. "Some things aren't always evaluated in the same manner."

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