

U.S. sponsored terrorism reveals hypocrisy

Hold the policy papers and suspend all meetings on terrorism. What this administration needs is not a new policy, not better intelligence and certainly not more street-

to topple the Sandinista regime by among other things — brace yourself — terrorism. The contras, with the aid



Richard Cohen

corner rhetoric, but a good full-length mirror. It should just stand back and look at the situation from the point of view of the other guy. It just might see a hypocrite.

Take the way we look at Cuba. It was cited by President Reagan as one of the five key exporters of terrorism, the new "Murder Incorporated." That was quite a speech the President gave, replete

with the full-throated self-righteous indignation of a world leader who does not play at terrorism and is appalled that others do. Fidel Castro, take that!

But what about what the United States has done to Cuba? Ours is the government, after all, that in 1961 pro-

duced the Bay of Pigs fiasco — an invasion of Cuba. Following that, the United States attempted to assassinate Castro, tried to slip a mickey into his cigars so his beard would fall out and even asked members of the Mafia to see

if they could not, in their parlance, get the Cuban leader to sleep with the fishes. If this is not terrorism — state supported terrorism at that — then Jesse Helms and Liberace are the same person.

How about Nicaragua? It, too, was on the President's list. This is not mere hypocrisy, but elephantine chutzpah. The Reagan administration, after all, has been funding for years an attempt

of the CIA, have mined harbors, assassinated officials, killed Sandinista supporters and blown up an occasional building. The administration, using

that all-purpose word "linkage," links Nicaragua to the murder of Marines in El Salvador, but fails to link that atrocity to the murder of Nicaraguans by the CIA-sponsored contras.

Third on the President's list was Iran. Unlike Cuba and Nicaragua, there is little doubt that Iran is in the terrorism business in a serious, methodical way. But even so, the Ayatollah must have gasped at the epic gall of the United States to point a

finger in the direction of his country after the CIA, in 1953, toppled the government of Mohammed Mossadegh and restored the Shah to power. That

coup might seem almost pre-history and of no importance now but you can bet it's not pre-history to the Ayatollah. He was a spry 52 years old at the time.

None of this history excuses Nicaraguan, Cuban or Iranian terrorism — and says nothing, of course, about the other two nations on the list, Libya and North Korea. And, at least to us, it has to make some difference that the United States really does represent something good in the world and that the other nations on the list are non-democratic regimes of varying degrees of loathsomeness.

But in Iran in 1953, we did not use terror to make life better for the average Iranian or to restore nonexistent



democracy, but to keep that country and its oil safe for the Western democ-

racies and, of course, the oil companies. The same thing holds for Nicaragua now. We did not, for example, use terror to topple the truly brutal Somaza regime. We reserve it for regimes with which we have ideological differences.

The political right, of which this administration is a part, loathes what it calls "moral equivalency" and even sponsors seminars to de-

nounce it. Okay — but moral equivalency is really a straw man. The real danger in Washington was never that

brutal regimes would be seen as our moral equivalent, but that self-righteousness would blind us to the consequences of our own actions. Little wonder that America's stirring calls to action against terrorism get shrugged

off by some other governments as nothing more than posturing. Moral obtuseness, not moral equivalency, is the real danger.

No one is suggesting that the United States uses terrorism more than any other country or that if we renounced it, so would everyone else. That's not the way the world works. But we would understand terrorism better and maybe

diminish it if we appreciated that the terrorist is not always a lunatic or a fanatic and not always linked to Moscow or Havana. On occasion, he can look distressingly familiar.

The mirror, please.
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'Post'-cerebral era marked by new linguistic meaning

A friend of mine, a man who chases the cutting edge of change the way his Gallic ancestors once pursued the holy grail, tells me that he is now "post-Yuppie." This isn't a formal announcement, mind you. That isn't necessary.



Ellen Goodman

I already knew that Yuppiedom was passe. In selected urban areas, women have burned their bow ties, begun leaving their running shoes at home and grown defensive about ordering white-wine spritzers. Men are increasingly secretive about owning VCRs and embarrassed to have the espresso machine right out there on the kitchen counter.

It was inevitable that my friend, who along with two others are probably the reigning troika of trends (I suspect they have a New York Magazine reporter permanently assigned), would be early in and early out of Yuppiedom.

So what struck me was not the fact that he was in post-Yuppie phase. It was the fact that he was using a post-Yuppie phrase.

With nary a warning from the traditional trend spotters, it appears that the post-war babies of the post-industrial society have begun placing their favorite prefix all over the American scene. These are the four little letters — p, o, s, t — which once meant "after," as in post-operative. But now they are being used to write premature political post-mortems.

Consider the academic who recently drew a profile of middle-class young American voters. They were, he told a reporter, "post-ideological."

The implication was that these voters had already been through the heavy philosophical stuff. They were not hostile to ideology, they were beyond it. Perhaps they'd taken it freshman year. Now, ideology was a bit like a Beta-Max. It was okay, but they wouldn't want to get stuck with it when something better came along.

Last year, the big phrase was post-feminist. Any young woman who had not personally signed up for Radical Feminist Cell 16 was called a member of the post-feminist generation. The label managed to wardate the women's move-

ment so that it seemed unfashionable. Feminism itself was described as something the country had outgrown, like a singed training bra.

Putting the four-letter "post" before the right sort of word is the kiss of datedness. The word becomes a Perrier gone flat in the marketplace. But it does this in the most apparently benign, nonjudgmental, neutral sort of way.

Consider the man I heard on the radio talking about the needs of Americans in the post-civil-rights era. The what? Separation of church and state, and free speech, he went on flatly, were all splendid ideas, but well, what do we need now, for the 1980s?

Then there are the commentators who talk about the Reagan post-welfare state, instead of what they mean: the anti-welfare state. There are even sociologists talking calmly about a post-literate world and a post-verbal generation. Once a 35-year-old described himself to me as a post-peacenik. I did not at that moment have the nerve to ask him whether he currently was "into" war.

I suppose there might be some modest value in this post-age. I think it would be amusing to be post-young instead of middle-aged. Reformed smokers could become post-smokers. Atheists could choose to be post-theists. Vegetarians could be post-carnivores. Retired citizens, post-workers. Divorce, post-marriage. The rest I would leave to post-erity.

But I am wary of linguistic tricks. "Post" is being sprinkled through the political language more generously than the dreaded "neo" ever was.

If my friend wants to be post-Yuppie, good luck to him. In his trendy troika the Yuppie has gone the way of the Babbitt and the Preppie. I don't care if he stops serving shitake mushrooms the way he once quit on kiwis. There is hardly any social judgment to be made between shitakes and chanterelles. No one really cares if we live in a post-kiwi world (except, I suppose, the kiwi grower).

But I get uncomfortable when we turn ideas into trends, when we trivialize concepts and values into games of "ins" and "outs." When ideology, literacy and civil rights are treated like racquetball, nouvelle cuisine and new-wave music, it's time to write a post-script to the era: Lable it post-cerebral.

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