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What Now in the Letelier Case?

Has the United States bungled its handling of the Letelier case? Charles Krause, The Post's South America correspondent, said so in a May 21 op-ed column. According to Mr. Krause, by asking Chile's Supreme Court to extradite three military intelligence officers accused of conspiracy in the Sheridan Circle bomb murders of former Chilean ambassador Orlando Letelier and Ronni Moffitt, the United States implicitly accepted the authority and independence of Chile's courts to decide the case. The Chilean court refused the extradition request.

But by asking Chile's Supreme Court to decide the case, the United States was only accepting that this was the channel through which the official answer of the Chilean government to the extradition request would be given.

With the refusal of that request, and considering the overwhelming evidence—the fact that a U.S. grand jury has indicted the three men, that a U.S.

jury has already convicted the other conspirators involved in the case—the United States can certainly retaliate by whatever means fall within its sovereignty.

Notwithstanding, Mr. Krause's conclusion that the United States has to live with its "mistake," the United States does have the right to retaliate. More, it has the duty to do so, if the conclusion from this tragic case is really to be that no one can commit an act of terrorism in the capital of this nation and smirk, unpunished, behind the robes of a thoroughly discredited court. That branch's submissiveness to the military authorities ever since the September 1973 coup has been widely documented by Amnesty International, the International Commission of Jurists, and the human-rights commissions of the Organization of American States and the United Nations.

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