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Terrorist Convention In Lebanon

There was a bizarre and frightening "convention" of international terrorists in southern Lebanon recently.

According to several sources, including Israeli intelligence officials and an actual eyewitness, as many as 1,000 members of various terrorist groups were identified with their Palestine Liberation Organization hosts in the no-man's-land near the United Nations cease-fire zones.

One source, who went to southern Lebanon to observe the terrorists firsthand, said the "conventioners" included members of the Red Brigades from Italy, the Baader-Meinhof Gang from West Germany, the Japanese Red Army and groups from Cuba, Libya, Pakistan and El Salvador.

The weird convocation of assassins in Lebanon was not unique. As far back as 1974, British intelligence uncovered ominous evidence that terrorist groups around the world were beginning to join in a loose underground alliance of revolutionary extremists. The British learned, for example, that Irish and Palestinian terrorists were training together in Ireland and the Middle East. German terrorists were smuggling arms to their counterparts in Ireland.

Dr. Robert Kupperman of Georgetown University's Center for Strategic and International Studies said there have been several international conclave of terrorist groups in recent years. The delegates discuss revolutionary goals and the means to achieve them.

Because the confederacy of criminals has no formal organization, with loose intergroup links at most, it is difficult and sometimes impossible, for outsiders to learn the whereabouts of the meetings, Kupperman explained. Still, U.S. and Israeli intelligence agents did manage to find out about conventions in Lausanne, Switzerland, last August, and in Caracas, Venezuela, last November. Also, Libya and Lebanon have clearly been the sites of several terrorist gatherings.

"But very rarely do you get the actual shooters, the people who plant the bombs, at these conventions," Kupperman told my reporter Jeff Nesbit. The delegates are usually the planners and "money men" from the various groups, he said.

One reason the terrorist organizations are so tough to crack is their pyramidal internal structure. For example, the Italian Red Brigades may have anywhere from 200 to 600 "shooters" at any given time. They're the front-line troops who do the actual dirty work, like assassinating foreign diplomats or blowing up buildings.

Supporting the shock troops are perhaps 3,000 individuals who handle the brigades' logistics and finances. And there may be anywhere from 10,000 to 100,000 people who give the group active support in one form or another.

Kupperman said the United States has some documentary evidence that the Soviet Union is indirectly encouraging the terrorist groups with arms, logistical facilities and training. Secretary of State Alexander Haig has repeatedly laid responsibility for much international terrorist mischief at the Kremlin's door, and a State Department official said there's "pretty clear evidence" of terrorist training camps in the Soviet Union.

One definite link between the Soviets and the terrorists is Muammar Qaddafi's Libya, which is the reason the Reagan administration has been so persistent in its hostility to that nation. Unfortunately, the Soviet Union and Libya aren't the only countries that export terrorism. Secret CIA documents identify at least 12 nations that deliberately encourage terrorism in other countries.