

The root cause of Mideast terrorism

Terror attacks seem to have joined traffic jams and overbooked flights as unavoidable, routine afflictions of the summer vacation season.

Right on cue, terrorists this week slaughtered a group of innocent tourists on a Greek cruise vessel. In Athens, a man was on trial for the bombing of a U.S. airliner. Another man went on trial in Frankfurt, charged with smuggling explosives into West Germany. In far-off Pakistan, five men were sentenced to hang for a bloody attack on a Pan-Am jet.

Clearly, terrorism is alive and well. Each new outrage brings strident calls from politicians and the media for "tough action" against terrorism. That's fine, but what?

Blaming Greece for laxity and being "soft on terrorism" is not the answer. Athens happens to have replaced bullet-riddled Beirut as the Mideast's favorite playground and traffic hub.

The Greeks are trying hard to combat both home-grown left-wing terrorists and a steady stream of Mideast killers. Athens has become an arena where Arab groups fight out their obscure feuds and where Israeli agents kill off Palestinian operatives.

Meanwhile, the world's worst terrorism is going on almost unnoticed in India's Punjab where Sikh extremists are daily murdering fellow Sikhs and Hindus alike. Since westerners are not affected, we don't care. Nor does anyone lose sleep over terrorism in Sri Lanka, against Pakistan, or over bomb attacks by the ANC against South African civilians.

Terrorism, as used by our media, is really a code word for attacks by Arabs or Iranians against westerners and Israelis.

After years of effort, western governments and brigades of anti-terrorism experts have proven unable



Eric ARGOLIS
in New York

to do much about terror attacks. Plug up one hole, and terrorists manage to find another, as this week's horrible events showed. You can't protect everything, short of running a Soviet-style police state. So what's to be done?

The answer, to me, has been clear for a long time. Look at the men cited at the beginning of this column. What links all of them is the common thread of Lebanon. All of these accused or convicted terrorists are either Lebanese or Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon. All are uneducated men in their late teens or early 20s. And all grew up in the chaos, bloodshed and madness that is war-torn Lebanon.

For the past 13 years, Lebanon has known nothing but ferocious civil war, invasion by Syria and Israel and growing chaos and anarchy. The young men who perpetrate heinous terrorist acts are really no more than members of streets gangs with the best small arms that profits from the hashish trade will buy. These youths have known nothing in their short, brutish lives but war and gangsterism thinly disguised as politics.

The 500,000 Palestinian refugees stuck in Lebanon have suffered more than any other group there. They have been massacred by Maronite Lebanese and attacked by Syrians. Israel has bombed and shelled

their camps for two decades. Thousands more Palestinians died or were made homeless during the 1982 Israeli invasion. Since then, more thousands have died or been wounded as Shia Lebanese of Amal besieged their camps.

Just recently, 200 or so Palestinians died in heavy fighting between rival factions. In Lebanon, sooner or later, everyone ends up fighting everyone else.

Many westerners and Israelis scoff at the view that Arab terrorism is caused in large part by suffering and environment. Those who hold this view ought to go and visit some of the shell-shattered Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon whose inmates were forced during heavy fighting to eat rats—or dead bodies. Or see the pitiful Palestinian families who have just been driven out of their holes in the ground outside Beirut by the Syrian army.

Why shouldn't youths who have grown up in such a nightmare jungle act like wild beasts? In the west, we accept that ghetto life causes a lot of criminal behavior. Why reject the same view applied to the infinitely worse conditions of Lebanon's squalid camps?

There is only one way to curb Mideast terrorism. That is to bring order to its fountainhead—Lebanon. It's like stopping an oil fire. You have to cap off the well, not fight the flames.

The Lebanese cannot bring peace to their own nation even if their Syrian and Israeli neighbors would let them—which, so far, they won't. The only answer, plainly, is a tough, neutral peacekeeping force of 60,000 to 80,000 men drawn from nations like India or Turkey, paid for by the West. It will take troops, not talk, to disarm and pacify Lebanon. And help end terrorism at its source.