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Terrorist Nerve Center Tempting Target

White House documents emphasize President Reagan's attitude toward any further tweaking of Uncle Sam's beard by Moslem terrorists: He's sick of being pushed around. Reagan believes that the American people "are tired of suffering insults at the hands of other nations," as one policy paper put it. For this reason, Reagan is convinced that "minimal risks" can be taken to bolster U.S. leadership in the world.

The list of target options that could both assuage the public's outrage and deal the terrorists a damaging blow includes the obvious ones such as Libya, Syria and Iran. But there's an even more tempting target: the ancient city of Baalbek in northeastern Lebanon.

If ever there were a viper's nest ripe for destruction, it is this terrorist plotting-and-training center in the Bekaa Valley, close to the Syrian border. Since 1975, the Bekaa has been the headquarters and nerve center for the greatest concentration of terrorists in the world today.

Protected by Syrian troops, who screen every outsider venturing into the area, the Bekaa Valley is only about an hour's drive from Damascus or Beirut. It is an ideally situated launching pad for terrorist operations anywhere in the world.

Among the groups that use the valley's facilities, which are defended by mobile batteries of Syrian anti-aircraft missiles, are terrorists linked to the notorious Ilyich Ramirez Sanchez (Carlos the Jackal) and radical Palestinians Abu Musa and Abu Nidal.

Of all the terrorist gangs in the Bekaa, the most numerous and blatant are those supported by Iran,

loosely lumped under the cover name of Islamic Jihad. The most vicious of these fanatics are the Shiite Hezbollah and the Islamic Amal, both based in Baalbek.

At one time or another, almost every American hostage held in Lebanon, aside from last June's TWA hijacking victims, has been kept at some location in the Bekaa Valley.

According to intelligence sources, two prominent Bekaa Valley terrorists are Sheik Subhi Tufail, leader of Hezbollah in the Bekaa, and Hussein Rezaie, commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard in the valley.

The nerve center for most of their depredations is a dilapidated building in downtown Baalbek known as "Hosseinieh." A former school, it serves today as the Bekaa Valley headquarters for the Revolutionary Guards.

The Iranian guard units were rushed to the Bekaa in June 1982, when Israel invaded Lebanon. Their strength quickly reached 350 and kept growing. It was from the Hosseinieh headquarters that terrorists planned the devastating bombings of the U.S. Embassy and Marine compounds in Beirut in 1983, as well as airplane hijackings, murders and kidnappings of Americans.

The old schoolhouse isn't the only identifiable target for U.S. retaliation in Baalbek. The Hotel Khawam is used by the Hezbollah as a military training school. The Hezbollah headquarters in the Sheik Abdullah barracks sits on a hillside above the town; a one-time Lebanese army post, it was the target of French and Israeli reprisal raids in 1983, but has since been rebuilt.