

Middle East Report by Robert Dreyfuss

Abu Nidal: a Mossad agent

A PLO leader has charged that Israeli intelligence runs Palestinian terrorism.

A top-level leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization has charged Israeli intelligence with acting as a controller of Palestinian terrorism.

In an interview in the Feb. 22 French daily *Le Monde*, Isam Sartawi, an official adviser to PLO leader Yasser Arafat, denounced renowned Palestinian terrorist Abu Nidal as an agent of the Israeli intelligence agency Mossad.

"Contrary to appearances," said Sartawi, "Abu Nidal is not an extremist, a maximalist of the Rejection Front, but a traitor who is working for the Israeli services. Austrian security services have established without any doubt that the gangsters of Abu Nidal not only killed Heinz Nittel, an associate of West German Chancellor Schmidt, last May and attacked a synagogue in Vienna in August, but also assassinated Naim Khader, the PLO representative in Brussels, last June. They had also planned to kill Yasser Arafat during one of his visits to Vienna a week later."

"Whose interest is it to kill one of our leaders, except Israel's?" Sartawi queried. "Whose interest is it to discredit the Palestinian resistance by committing anti-Semitic crimes? We do not even ask ourselves these questions anymore, since members of the Abu Nidal group that we are detaining in Beirut are known to have been recruited by the Mossad in the occupied territories."

Sartawi went on to point to

"other Arab countries" that are de facto working with the Mossad to assist Abu Nidal and promote Palestinian extremism—an implicit reference to Syria and Libya.

Sartawi's explosive statements corroborate the recent documented statement by Judge Ferdinando Imposimato of Rome, that the Mossad, working with Libya, the Soviet KGB, and radical Palestinian and Arab networks, is behind both "left" and "right" terrorism in Italy (see Special Report).

A few days prior to Judge Imposimato's statement, Israeli Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir, at the conclusion of a visit to Rome, was asked by the Italian daily *Corriere della Sera* whether or not it was true that the Mossad was behind international terrorism. Shamir hastily dodged the question, calling it absurd and refusing further comment.

If effective international action follows up Sartawi's and Imposimato's leads, the tables will be turned not only on Israeli intelligence's terrorist capabilities but on the international network behind the worldwide drug- and arms-smuggling cartel.

Collusion with Israel by radical Arabs (particularly Syrians) is borne out by reports from Arab diplomatic sources that a political deal has been struck between the Begin and Assad regimes to heighten tensions between the two countries. In pursuing a war strategy, President Assad hopes to rally his

country behind him, thereby staving off a coup d'état.

Arab diplomats have expressed the fear that Assad's and Begin's brinkmanship could backfire, precipitating a fifth Arab-Israeli war.

Syrian-Israel interests also coincide in the common involvement of both the Begin and Assad governments in dirty-money laundering and drug-trafficking operations being run through Lebanon. President Hafez Assad's brother Rifaat is one of the ringleaders of these illegal operations, centered on the Israeli-sponsored cultivation of hashish in the Bekaa Valley, southern Lebanon's new cash crop.

According to Turkish drug enforcement sources, the main jumping-off points for drug smuggling from the Middle East into Europe are Lebanon and Syria. In addition to Lebanese hashish, opium and heroin from Iran are being routed through Syria and Lebanon, via the Kurdish sections of Turkey, then on to Turkish Cyprus and into northern Italy and Great Britain. The longstanding "preferred" route for drug smuggling—through Turkey to Europe—has recently been shut down as a result of the Turkish government's clampdown on illegal drug traffic.

Sartawi's revelations about the Abu Nidal-Mossad links should have profound reverberations in Syria, the protector of Abu Nidal. The Syrian government, long kept in power by clever political sleight-of-hand, is now in trouble, and Arab intelligence sources do not rule out the possibility of a coup after a Muslim Brotherhood revolt. Indeed, on Jan. 20, foreign news agencies reported a still-unconfirmed attempted coup in Damascus by air-force personnel.