

Pan Am atrocity: prelude to Mideast war?

by Jeffrey Steinberg

American and British investigators have now confirmed that Pan Am flight 103 with 259 passengers and crew was blown out of the skies over Lockerbie, Scotland on Dec. 21 by a powerful bomb planted in the luggage compartment. While Western security services have tentatively placed the immediate responsibility for the bombing on the Damascus, Syria-based PFLP-General Command of Ahmed Jibril, broader complicity in the heinous action is being also laid at the doorsteps of both the Soviet Union and Israel.

And according to at least one senior Pentagon source, Washington has not altogether ruled out the possibility that some Israeli faction carried out the bombing. The London *Times* of Dec. 23 actually speculated in a prominent front-page article that the Mossad blew up 103 in order to “deep six” the U.S.-PLO dialogue. One respected retired Israeli military commander, while denying that the Mossad would have carried out such an act of mass brutality, told *EIR* that he could not rule out the possibility that extremist elements within Israel, including ex-Defense Minister Ariel Sharon, did order the bombing.

This broader suspected complicity by Moscow and Tel Aviv underscores the fact that the entire eastern Mediterranean is now on a hair trigger for war.

Russian policy, Israeli lunacy

Even though Mikhail Gorbachov gave tacit Soviet support for the Reagan administration’s belated opening of a political dialogue with PLO chairman Yassir Arafat, Moscow is actually emphatically opposed to any solution to the Palestine crisis that might lead to a stabilization of the region

and a resurgence of American presence and credibility. Contrary to Anglo-American dreams of a “New Yalta” power sharing arrangement with Moscow based on superpower-dictated “solutions” to a string of simmering regional crises, Moscow is actually committed to a two-track global policy: 1) capture Western Europe with its 350 million inhabitants and its modern industrial and agricultural base; and 2) foment chaos in every other strategic spot on the globe. This doctrine of denying territory to her Western adversaries is key to evaluating Moscow’s simultaneous “new diplomacy” and escalation of irregular warfare.

At least one prominent Middle East analyst has emphasized to *EIR* that Soviet foreign policy initiatives are always taken as an integral feature of Moscow’s overall global irregular warfare. These initiatives often rely on “Pavlovian” stimulus-response estimates of what the policy initiatives will trigger. Thus, when Moscow gave its tacit support to George Shultz’s opening of an official U.S. State Department dialogue with PLO officials following Arafat’s recent United Nations speech in Geneva, the Soviets anticipated that Israel would respond to that American initiative by moving to overturn the strategic chessboard. According to this specialist, the Pan Am bombing may very well have been just such a Soviet-induced and Israeli-conducted strategic gambit.

Israeli officials have themselves contributed to this suspicion with a string of blood-curdling statements in response to the U.S.-PLO talks. Newly elected Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir all but blamed the Reagan administration for the Pan Am 103 bombing, charging that the de facto American recognition of the PLO had emboldened Palestinian terrorists

to continue their murder spree. Foreign Minister Moshe Arens conclusively declared that "international Arab terror" was responsible for the bombing. While stopping short of outright accusing the PLO, Arens labeled the PLO the "foremost terror organization" in the world.

PLO chairman Arafat, for his part, condemned the Pan Am 103 bombing at a Dec. 23 Rome press conference, saying, "It is not a crime against one particular group of people, it is a crime against humanity."

The suspicion that Israel was behind the Pan Am bombing does not contradict the evidence now surfacing of a PFLP-GC role in the blind terrorist attack. The relatively unknown PFLP-GC is a closely held asset of Syrian intelligence. Its head, Ahmed Jibril, is widely believed to be an agent of Syrian intelligence. Since the early autumn, the group's number-two man, Hafez Qassem Dalkamoni, has been based out of East Berlin, working on building up terrorist cells inside West Germany and Sweden. On Oct. 27, Dalkamoni and 13 associates were arrested in West Germany. In the raids, sophisticated bomb-making equipment was captured.

Syrian officials, including Rifat Assad, have maintained longstanding collaborative ties to the Sharon faction inside Israel. Both Israel and Syria have been greatly alarmed by the opening of the U.S.-PLO dialogue. Focusing on the U.S.-Soviet "new détente" aspect of the Palestine negotiations, the *Financial Times* of London on Dec. 21 noted, "In Syrian eyes, the U.S.-Soviet détente should be as unpopular in Tel Aviv as in Damascus."

Was Moscow really brought in?

According to U.S. intelligence sources, President-elect George Bush played an active hand in the State Department's about face opening of diplomatic talks with Arafat and the PLO, and that Bush's idea of a U.S. policy intervention into the Israel-Palestine crisis does not necessarily envision a major role for Moscow. Reportedly, ongoing U.S. back-channel talks with Arafat associates were carried out with a clear intent of keeping the contents from falling into Soviet hands.

Bush has reportedly also elicited the help of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in boxing in the new Israeli government and forcing them to ultimately accept a direct dialogue with the PLO. While the *New York Times* on Dec. 26 touted Mubarak's statement that he would be willing to visit Israel to discuss the peace process with Shamir as an indication that Egypt would accept a negotiating track that excluded the PLO, Middle Eastern sources have emphatically stated that Mubarak is firmly committed to forcing Israel into the direct talks.

And Israeli sources inside the "peace camp" have confirmed that the United States is firm in its commitment to drag Israel to the negotiating table with Arafat. According to these sources, the United States played a decisive role in



Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir: dead set against any peace settlement with the Palestinians.

blocking any kind of Israeli government dominated exclusively by right-wing and religious fundamentalist hardliners. All that Shamir and company can do, the sources said, is to hope to stall the process as long as possible through contentless promises of a "new peace plan." Their only real option is war.

Thus, Israeli "terrorism specialists" have gone out of their way to emphasize the imminent threat represented by Muammar Qaddafi's newly acquired chemical warfare plant, capable of producing chemical weapons that could be fired on Israel by intermediate range missiles. Whether through a raid on that Libyan chemical plant—replaying Israel's bombing of a civilian nuclear power plant in Baghdad several years ago—or through an orchestrated "little war" with Syria over Lebanon, Israel appears now to be hell-bent on blowing up the region to kill the peace process. The incoming Bush administration will have to impose heavy penalties on Israel if such a move is to be avoided. And if President-elect Bush really intends to recast American foreign policy in the Middle East away from the recent years' drift to joint U.S.-Russian initiatives, he will have to increasingly focus on the dangers inherent in a Soviet-Israeli joint effort. The first signs of such a Soviet-Israeli alliance may be found in the rubble of Pan Am 103.