

Behind the mystery air crashes: Soviet electromagnetic sabotage?

by Rainer Apel and Mark Burdman

The Western alliance was faced with an unconventional array of attacks on its security in 1988, for which a conventional explanation

lost more military planes than exist in the whole Norwegian Air Force. Pakistan's Gen. Zia ul-Haq and Germany's Franz Josef Strauss, two key leaders who were acutely aware of the security threat from the East, died under strange circumstances. The number of unexplained deaths of British scientists working in the defense field soared to almost 25.

In the face of such forms of unconventional threat, *EIR* was the only publication that challenged conventional wisdom and put forward new hypotheses on the nature of the threats from the Warsaw Pact, based on Soviet development of what might be called "post-nuclear methods."

By September-October, certain of the more sober of Western spokesmen and think tanks, such as CIA Deputy Director Robert Gates and London's International Institute for Strategic Studies, began to warn about the increased threat to the West from Gorbachov's Russia. But these warnings were inadequate, as they remained within the bounds of traditional perceived threats from the East.

What is required, is a new quality of thinking, of the type pointed to in *EIR*'s report, "Electromagnetic-Effect Weapons: The Technology and the Strategic Implications." Published in early 1988, first in English, and then in German and French, the report was featured in *EIR* briefing seminars in Paris, Lyons, Marseilles, Metz, and Normandy in France; Madrid, Spain; London, England; Brescia and Vercelli in Italy; Copenhagen, Denmark; Stockholm, Sweden; and Oslo, Norway. *EIR* played a role similar to the one it played in 1982-84, when it was the only institution that held seminars across Western Europe on the new strategic realities created by strategic defense systems based on "new physical principles" (later known as the SDI).

Lyndon LaRouche made a speaking appearance in Lyons during the summer, his first in Western Europe on this subject since the last quarter of 1987, when he had helped launch the information campaign about "electromagnetic-effect weapons," in speeches in Munich, West Germany and in Milan, Italy. During the year, *EIR*'s material on the subject was favorably covered on Italian television, in the French military magazine *Défense et Armements*, and in a leading Austrian military publication. The report has also provoked a furious

behind-the-scenes debate in military strategic circles in Britain and elsewhere.

The question of sabotage

The threat to Western defense capabilities is best seen in what has happened to military aircraft. As the year-end approached, *Jane's Defence Weekly*, the prestigious military review published in Britain, released a study of the 12-month period ending Oct. 31, listing a total of 128 NATO aircraft lost in air crashes. By Dec. 10, the figure had already risen to 135.

The Dec. 8 crash of a U.S. A-10 A Thunderbolt II in a residential area of the German town of Remscheid, which killed the pilot and five civilians, highlighted the year of air disasters.

On the one hand, this disaster had the anticipated effect of increasing the violent campaign by Moscow's fellow-travelers in West Germany against military airflights over German soil. On the other hand, it was also indicative of certain behind-the-scenes rumblings, that the word "sabotage" was prominently displayed in certain West German newspapers reporting on the crash. This had not happened in response to previous air crashes, including the Ramstein Air Show disaster of Aug. 28.

The Dec. 10 issue of the *Bild Zeitung* mass-circulation daily published a list of "six burning questions" on the Remscheid disaster on its front page, "sabotage" ranking second among them, after the possibility of a "pilot heart attack." In a centerfold feature, *Bild Zeitung* revealed that German judges investigating the Remscheid crash "are not ruling out that there was sabotage of the machine." The Dec. 10 *Stuttgarter Nachrichten* reported that sabotage was among the tracks of investigation being pursued.

Cui bono?

What is striking, is how little talk of sabotage there was this year, despite the vast amount of talk about the terrorist threat to the West, and despite the unprecedented number of planes lost.

On the numbers: As *Jane's* documented it, the destroyed craft included 97 combat planes and 31 support aircraft plus helicopters. The United States alone lost 40 combat planes; 20 of these were F-16s, and most of them crashed over Ger-

many. Not all of the military air crashes and other incidents destroying planes were reported, but between one-third and one-half of all incidents occurred in German air space or at the air bases of allied powers in West Germany.

Official statements on the incidents were unconvincing: that they were due to either "material fatigue" or "pilot error." *EIR* began in-depth investigations into the issue of sabotage. Even more than the technology issues involved, the more fundamental *political* question motivating such an investigation is: "Who benefits from the crashes?" The interplay between these air crashes and the Moscow-controlled political campaign of Social Democratic and Green Party demagogues against NATO air forces in West Germany, was all too evident. Increasingly since the spring of 1988, the pattern of air crashes became densest just when the "anti-air force" opposition was raising, or about to raise, new political demands.

This addresses the political-strategic problem related to sabotage, the Soviet campaign for a withdrawal and reduction in size of Western air forces in Europe. West Germany is a special target of this campaign, because half of the 600 combat aircraft the United States has stationed in Europe, are deployed at German air bases. Soviet assets in West Germany have made a big deal about making "dual-capable aircraft" the next subject of arms-control discussions. Other fellow-travelers insist on trading NATO "quality" (superiority in air technology in particular) for Warsaw Pact "quantity."

For much of 1988, the "anti-air force" campaign was not successful. What changed the atmosphere, was the Ramstein Air Show disaster on Aug. 28. Upon demands from the West German Social Democrats and Greens, who announced that they had been "predicting" such a calamity all along, all air shows were banned in Germany. The A-10 crash in Remscheid—which was not the result of a low-altitude test flight but occurred during a routine transfer of 18 A-10s from Britain to Germany—provided the Soviet-inspired propaganda campaign against NATO low-altitude flights with a major boost.

Hypothesis of electromagnetic interference

How could sabotage be carried out? While technical sabotage, like tampering with mechanical or electronic airplane parts by agents operating on NATO air bases, could not be ruled out, *EIR* researchers concentrated on the question of electromagnetic sabotage. This would involve sending destructive electromagnetic pulse (EMP) shock signals, from a device based on the ground, in the air, or in space.

Research into this technology has been going on for about two decades, and the Soviets have already used relatively primitive first-generation devices to blind U.S. satellites, and likely also military aircraft, in previous years. Sensitive avionics of a modern jet aircraft can be blinded, as can the pilot himself. Paralyzing the pilot for just a few seconds during a critical phase of the flight, like curves, loopings,

etc. would in most cases suffice to down his plane.

When *EIR*'s "Electromagnetic-Effect Weapons" report was published in February 1988, most experts were skeptical, and preferred to hold on to the "pilot error" interpretation of the air crashes. During the period from late March to late August, highlighted by the crash of three Italian jets at an air show at Ramstein Air Base, West Germany, which caused the death of 70 spectators and the three Italian pilots, some 50 NATO aircraft were destroyed in crashes or other "accidents."

In one year, NATO lost 128 aircraft in mysterious accidents—more than the entire combat strength of the Norwegian Air Force. While the world's press dwelt mostly on "pilot error," EIR's investigators looked at a more convincing hypothesis.

The Ramstein incident represented a phase-change. Based on the LaRouche hypothesis, the Schiller Institute, the transatlantic group founded by Helga Zepp-LaRouche, launched an international call for a "ruthless investigation of the series of NATO air crashes." The call was, in a matter of days, signed by numerous defense experts and former military leaders of NATO, such as Generals Friedrich A. Grunewald (ret., German Air Force) and Paul A. Scherer (ret., former head of the MAD, the Military Counterintelligence of Germany), Generals George Jones and Earl F. Cole (ret., both U.S.), Gen. García Conde-Señal (ret., Spain), Rear Adm. Ralph Earle (ret., U.S.), and numerous scientific experts, like Dr. James D. Frazer of the United States.

The Schiller Institute's call and a concentrated campaign around it internationally had a substantial impact on the expert debate in Italy and Germany, breaking the silence of the international media on the sabotage issue. On Dec. 11, the Italian weekly *Epoca* wrote: "Tornado airplanes fell down all over Europe, but there is not any precise cause known at this time; anyway, it is not excluded that some electromagnetic interference with the sophisticated avionics instruments of the Tornados could be in some way the cause of the crashes."

The article also noted that electromagnetic radiation can interfere with "the delicate electrical signals exchanged by brain cells themselves." This is what LaRouche has charged earlier this year, pointing at Soviet or Soviet-related electromagnetic interference in all cases where NATO pilots allegedly became "disoriented and lost control of their planes."