

New revelations of Syria's terror role

by Thierry Lalevée

The spectacular break of diplomatic relations between Britain and Syria on Oct. 24, and the Nov. 10 decision of the European foreign ministers to implement limited sanctions against Damascus, have hardly brought Syria's new troubles to an end.

The Syrian leadership is well aware that the worst is yet to come, as indicated by the extraordinary public-relations campaign of Vice-President Abdel Halim Khaddam. Within the first 10 days following the imposition of sanctions, he appeared on four French and West German television programs, discussing the trials of the terrorist Hindawi brothers, whose cases allowed Western governments to prove the involvement of Syrian intelligence services in international terrorism. In each appearance, Khaddam's message was the same: "The Hindawi are Israelis agents. . . . Their father was arrested as an Israeli spy in the 1960s."

In another interview with the German daily *Die Welt* on Nov. 18, Khaddam warned that Europe is "being blackmailed by the United States" into applying sanctions against Syria, and concluded by praising France's behavior and "praying for Bonn not to fall into the trap into which London fell."

Khaddam's activities underline the fact that, however limited, the sanctions do hurt Syria. Perhaps not immediately, but in six months time, the cut-off of EC credit will be very much felt. It also hurts politically; those countries which came to Syria's aid can be counted on the fingers of one hand. Syria's isolation has been total, even though Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah did choose not to welcome Britain's Prince Charles to Riyadh on Nov. 17, in a gesture of opposition to the European stand.

Nonetheless over the coming weeks, Syria has several problems to face. Despite much controversy, the arrival of Prime Minister Thatcher in Washington on Nov. 14 was welcomed by a series of anti-Syrian measures by the United States. American Ambassador William Eagleton will not return to Damascus. Then, Washington imposed a boycott of Syrian airlines and related agencies.

Syria blew the story of the U.S.-Iranian deals, in retaliation for the British action, as well as to warn that negotiations with Teheran should not supercede dealing with Syria. However, Damascus is now unsure whether such a scandal may not strengthen Washington's resolve to go after Syria. On

Nov. 17, the U.S. government came out with a five-page public memorandum, stating that between 1983 and 1986, more than 500 persons were either killed or wounded in terror actions sponsored by the Syrian government.

The memorandum blames Damascus for the September massacre at the Istanbul synagogue which killed more than 20. Up until now, investigations had been inconclusive. In recent weeks, Turkish police intelligence has come out with conclusive evidence implicating Damascus. This followed the arrest in late October of Adnan Musa Suleiman Ameri, who worked as a translator at the Jordanian embassy in Ankara. During his interrogation, Ameri first admitted to the killing of a Jordanian diplomat in Turkey a year ago, a murder then claimed by Abu Nidal's new Black September organization. Later, he also gave details of how, together with members of the Islamic Jihad organization in Turkey, he had helped establish the logistical network for the Abu Nidal group to perpetrate the September massacre.

Arrests of some 20 accomplices later unveiled a plot whereby the Abu Nidal organization, sponsored by Damascus, planned the assassination of Turkish Prime Minister T. Ozal. The prime minister was reportedly embarrassed by the revelations, which had been given to the media by Turkish intelligence during his absence.

Turkish retaliation may prove serious. Even Greece's secret defense pact with Syria will be of little help to Damascus. No doubt these consequences were in the mind of the Soviet Commander of the Black Sea Fleet, Admiral Kronopulo, when he warned from Piraeus on Nov. 19 that Moscow would come to Syria's aid if attacked by the United States or its allies. It was the first visit to Greece by a Soviet Black Sea Fleet commander ever.

Next: Berlin

Meanwhile, all eyes are fixed on West Berlin where a second Hindawi case began on Nov. 17. Ahmed Narwarf Mansour Hasi, brother of Nèzar Hindawi, is being judged along with accomplices for the March 29 bombing of the "German-Arab Friendship society" in West Berlin. Hasi, who traveled together with Nezar to Tripoli, then to Damascus in February of this year, was given a bag of explosives at the Syrian embassy in East Berlin. The explosives proved defective. Twice a Syrian explosives expert came to Hasi's flat to repair the bomb. Twice, if not more, Hasi got in touch with Col. Haitham Saeed of Syrian Air Force intelligence, then in East Berlin to control the operation.

Whenever the trial ends, Syria, not Hasi, will be in the dock of the accused and will be condemned.

Bonn recalled its ambassador from Damascus at the beginning of November, and he is not expected to be replaced. But even if Bonn were not to follow the British in breaking relations, this would be no victory for Damascus. Accumulated evidence of its role in international terrorism points to the fact that retaliation will go much farther than mere diplomatic steps.