

Al-Kassar, the Lockerbie coverup, and puzzling U.S. policy on Lebanon

by Jeffrey Steinberg

On Sunday, Nov. 26, Tiny Rowland's London *Observer* published a front-page diatribe against Pan American World Airways for its accusations that the CIA covered up the Lockerbie tragedy of last Dec. 21, in which 270 people perished when PanAm Flight 103 was blown up by a terrorist bomb over Scotland. The *Observer* attack, penned by Simon de Bruxelles and John Merritt, focused particular attention on discrediting PanAm's allegations that the bomb attack, widely known to have been orchestrated by PFLP-General Command chief Ahmed Jibril, was somehow linked to a Syrian drug running network operating out of Frankfurt Airport under the direction of Monzer Al-Kassar.

While the jury is still out on whether or not the PanAm investigative report (published in *EIR*, Nov. 24, 1989) is accurate as to the precise chronology of events leading up to the PanAm massacre, there is no doubt whatsoever about some crucial features of the PanAm report and the coverup emanating from U.S. government officials and private individuals like Tiny Rowland who were caught up in the recent years' Iran-Contra fiasco.

The most essential features of the undisputed aspects of the Lockerbie dossier are:

- PFLP-GC head Ahmed Jibril is an operative of Syrian intelligence and President Hafez al-Assad. According to "Frontline," a recently aired PBS documentary, Jibril, a former captain in the Syrian Army, meets several times a week with senior officials of Syrian intelligence, and receives military equipment and use of secure bases in Syria from the Assad regime. More than anyone else, President Assad bears responsibility for the 270 innocent lives lost in Flight 103.

- Syria's Assad is one of the world's biggest narco-terrorists. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration officially estimates that Syria earns over \$1 billion a year in profits from its opium production in the Bekaa Valley alone. Syria's drug operations are fully integrated with the so-called Bulgarian Connection, through which heroin, hashish, and, more recently, cocaine find their way into the European markets from fields and laboratories inside the Bekaa Valley, and the profits are passed through a worldwide money-laundering apparatus where they are commingled with profits from the Colombian cocaine cartels.

- Since the tenure of Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger, every American administration has covered up the Soviet-backed Assad regime's narco-terrorist activities. This

holds true for the Bush administration, despite the President's much-heralded commitment to fight a war on drugs. Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, the former president of Kissinger Associates, has described Syria's Assad as a "force for peace" in the Middle East.

Who is Monzer Al-Kassar?

Sources close to the official investigations into the Lockerbie massacre have told *EIR* that Monzer Al-Kassar was indeed a figure in the PanAm bomb plot, via drug-trafficking operations through the Frankfurt area. While no evidence has yet surfaced publicly corroborating this claim, the alleged involvement of the Syrian multi-millionaire in the massacre provides a key to understanding why Tiny Rowland and CIA director William Webster, among others, are so anxious to bury the Lockerbie scandal.

According to a wide range of published sources reviewed by *EIR* in the preparation of this investigative report, Monzer Al-Kassar is one of the Syrian regime's preeminent arms and drug traffickers; an intimate of President Assad's brother Rifaat, a business partner of Rifaat's son Siraas Assad, and a relative by marriage of Syria's intelligence chief, Gen. Ali Assi Duba. When Al-Kassar was denied entry to Britain in 1986 because of a prior drug conviction and a pending prosecution for shipping bomb components to terrorists (he was later sentenced *in absentia* to eight years in jail), he was traveling on a Syrian diplomatic passport.

Despite admissions by U.S. government officials that Al-Kassar has been investigated by the FBI, the CIA, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, and the U.S. Customs Service for crimes including drug trafficking and suspected involvement in the *Achille Lauro* hijacking in which one American citizen was killed, the Reagan National Security Council apparatus behind the Iran-Contra affair nevertheless used Al-Kassar as a conduit of Soviet bloc arms to the Contras in Nicaragua.

Documents from the files of the Secord-Hakim Lake Resources front company detailed several arms purchases from Al-Kassar's firm Alkastronics Trading Company, including a \$1.5 million shipment of Polish-made AK-47 Russian assault rifles which wound up being seized en route. British press accounts detail tens of millions of dollars in Contra arms shipments by Al-Kassar from Yugoslavia through Britain in 1985-86.

Among Al-Kassar's partners in the Contra supply effort, according to press accounts, were: Britain's KMS security consulting firm headed by retired SAS Col. David Walker; Britain's prestigious Hall and Watts Defense Sales; the Lisbon-based Defex Corp. headed by Marcellino DeBrito and run behind the scenes by ex-CIA official Thomas Clines, an intimate of another former top CIA man Theodore G. Shackley; Italian arms magnate and Irangate figure Borletti; and London-based shady arms dealer Ben Banerjee, a principal in the recent trial of British arms merchant and Irangate figure Michael Aspin.

Through his Vienna offices, Al-Kassar also apparently became involved with the Austrian Socialist Party and with suspected Soviet agent and technology spy Udo Proksch. According to a recently published, book-length account of the Proksch spy case, the Austrian Communist Proksch, and the former Vienna mayor and Austrian foreign minister Leopold Graz, were guests of Al-Kassar's at his Marbella, Spain mansion, where a variety of East bloc arms transactions were discussed. Al-Kassar reportedly played a pivotal role in Austria's own Irangate scandal, in which large amounts of arms and ammunition from the Austrian firm Noricum were shipped illegally to the Khomeini regime in 1985 through Libyan and Syrian cutouts.

Al-Kassar's name also surfaced prominently in a 1985 terrorist attack in Paris by members of the Abul Abbas Palestinian Liberation Front. Details of that role surfaced following the arrest in Paris of a West German neo-Nazi terrorist Odfried Hepp in April 1985. Hepp and Al-Kassar frontman Mohammed Ghadban were accused by French authorities of plotting a terrorist wave targeting Amsterdam, Vienna, Madrid, and Paris.

Despite these elaborate ties to major arms-trafficking circles on both sides of the East-West divide (Al-Kassar's own arms company maintains offices in Warsaw and Damascus, as well as Vienna, Marbella, and Beirut), Al-Kassar is perhaps even better known as a major figure in international drug trafficking. The U.S. DEA says that his family is "reputed to be the largest drug and arms dealing family in Syria."

The Syrian drug connection

Al-Kassar has been linked to a series of major drug deals, dating back to a mid-1970s conviction on marijuana-smuggling charges in Britain for which he served over a year in detention. In both France and Britain, he has also been linked to heroin shipments totaling over 100 kilos.

The most damning profile of Al-Kassar as a major fixture in the Assad regime's global drug-trafficking operations is contained in a recently published West German book, *Godfather of Terror*. The author, writing under the pseudonym Manfred Morstein, is reportedly a former West German undercover police investigator who based the book on his own investigations and on the massive police file maintained on the three Al-Kassar brothers.

According to Morstein's account, from no later than October 1969, Monzer and Ghassan Al-Kassar were involved in an international car theft operation that stretched from Greece to Denmark. The cars were also apparently used to transport Lebanese hashish to markets all over continental Europe and the British Isles. By 1974, both brothers had been arrested for their auto and drug-running operations in Britain, Denmark, and Italy.

In 1975, as the civil war was breaking out in Lebanon, the Al-Kassar brothers, according to Morstein, branched out into heroin trafficking, joining forces with Sicilian mafia chieftan Gaetano Badalamenti. On Jan. 23, 1978, Ghassan Al-Kassar was arrested in Paris, along with a Badalamenti lieutenant in possession of four pounds of heroin. Ghassan was sentenced to eight years in jail in France.

By 1978, Monzer Al-Kassar, according to Morstein, was running a kidnaping and ransom ring in war-torn Lebanon in partnership with Abul Abbas, targeting wealthy Saudi businessmen.

By 1984, Al-Kassar's name surfaced in a Syrian arms deal with another Syrian, Ali Racep who is based in Sofia, Bulgaria. Ali Racep is identified by Italian Magistrate Palermo as an agent of the Bulgarian secret police KDS, assigned to broker drug and arms deals. He reportedly works closely with Ghassan Al-Kassar, who operates a Sofia-based company Endanov. Ghassan's wife, the daughter of Syrian intelligence chief Ali Duba, is identified by the Italians as a courier for the PFLP of George Habash. Her brother, Nabil Wehbe, is the First Secretary at the Lebanese embassy in Sofia and helps facilitate arms and drug shipments through Bulgaria for the Al-Kassar ring.

According to Morstein, by late 1985, Al-Kassar has expanded his auto theft and drug trafficking operations into Poland, Canada and South America in partnership with a Canadian suspected cocaine dealer named Kenneth-Sidney Young. Young is believed to be the link between Al-Kassar's European/Middle East drug and weapons operations and the Medellín and Cali cartels of Colombia. By some accounts, the ties between Young and Al-Kassar were also integral to Contra arms shipments, bolstering allegations that the Iran-Contra scandal is above all a drugs-for-weapons case.

The connections between Al-Kassar and the Medellín Cartel were firmly established in August 1987, when Belgian police seized a Paraguayan airliner carrying 115 kilograms of cocaine. The West German national arrested while attempting to pick up the shipment, Erich Bunte, confessed that he was working for Al-Kassar and that he was present in early July at a meeting in Marbella between Al-Kassar, Pablo Escobar Gaviria and Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha. Spanish police apparently got onto the drug business transpiring at the Al-Kassar Marbella estate, because on July 23, 1987, border guards prevented Al-Kassar from entering the country. He was traveling aboard his private jet with Salmon Izz-Edden, the brother of the Syrian military commander in the

Bekaa Valley. At that exact moment, Rifaat Assad was reportedly at Al-Kassar's Marbella mansion waiting to meet with the duo.

Throughout the period of the arms and drug transactions of the mid-1980s, Al-Kassar maintained a controlling interest in the Banco de Bilbao, where he maintained large personal bank accounts along with Hafez al-Assad, Rifaat al-Assad, Kenneth-Sidney Young, and Ali Issa Duba.

Court order

On Monday, Nov. 27, Federal District Court Chief Judge Thomas C. Platt in Brooklyn, N.Y. rejected a government effort to quash subpoenas filed by Pan American World Airways. Among the items demanded by PanAm in its Sept. 27 filings were all records maintained by the CIA, FBI, DEA, National Security Council, National Security Agency, and State Department concerning Monzer Al-Kassar.

The results of that document production brawl may go a long way toward exposing the Bush and prior administrations' coverup of Syria's narco-terrorist activities. Whether the Al-Kassar connection provides the key to fully solving the Lockerbie case or not, the surfacing of those documents will most certainly unlock the truth behind the U.S. government's abysmal track record in combatting narco-terrorism, especially Soviet-sponsored international narco-terrorism.

MIDDLE EAST INSIDER

Weekly Confidential Newsletter

Executive Intelligence Review has been the authority on Middle East affairs for a decade. In 1978, *EIR* presented a coherent profile of the "Islamic fundamentalist" phenomenon. *EIR* had the inside story of the Irangate scandal before anyone else: In 1980, *EIR* exposed the late Cyrus Hashemi as the Iranian intelligence man in Washington, organizing arms deals and terror.

Middle East Insider, created in November 1986, brings you:

- **the inside story of U.S. Mideast policy**
- **what the Soviets are really doing in the region**
- **confidential reports from inside the Middle East and North Africa that no one else dares to publish**
- **accuracy on the latest terror actions and terrorist groups**

A subscription also includes a "hot line," where you can call for more information on any item we publish.

Yearly subscription at 5000-DM. Write or call: Middle East Insider c/o EIR Dotzheimerstr. 166, P.O. Box 2308, 62 Wiesbaden F.R.G. Tel: (6121) 88 40. In the U.S., write to: EIRNS, P.O. Box 17390, Washington, D.C. 20041-0390.

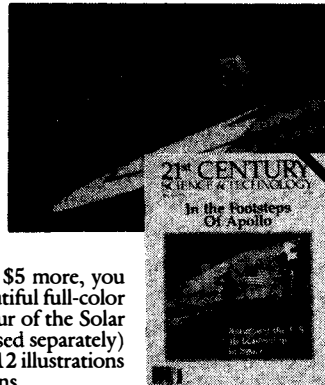
Give a gift with a future

The magazine that covers tomorrow's technologies today.

21st CENTURY'S
1990 Calendar

Special gift offer:
Three 1-year
subscriptions for \$50

Plus a gift for you: For only \$5 more, you can order 21st Century's beautiful full-color 1990 calendar, "A Grand Tour of the Solar System." (\$10 each if purchased separately) Calendars are 8½ × 11" with 12 illustrations of the planets and their moons.



Enclosed is \$_____ for:

- One year subscription (6 issues) —\$20
- 3 one-year subscriptions—\$50
- 3 one-year subscriptions plus calendar—\$55
- Additional calendars at one for \$10, two for \$15, three for \$20 (price includes postage)

U.S. currency only. Gift cards available for subscriptions. Please print names of gift recipients on a separate paper.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Send to: 21st Century, Dept. N, P.O. Box 65473, Washington, D.C. 20035 Telephone (703) 777-7473.

EIR AUDIO REPORT

gives you an hour cassette each week of the news, analysis, interviews, and commentary that Establishment media don't want you to hear.

EIR AUDIO REPORT

comes to you from the staff of *Executive Intelligence Review*, the magazine founded by Lyndon LaRouche, with bureaus around the world.

With EIR AUDIO REPORT,

you get in an hour what "All-News Radio" won't give you in a lifetime.

First with the War on Drugs.

First with the Food for Peace.

First to drive a stake in the heart of Satanism.

Listen to **EIR AUDIO REPORT** each week.

\$500 per annual subscription.

Make check or money order payable to: EIR News Service, P.O. Box 17390, Washington, D.C. 20041-0390. MasterCard and Visa accepted. Or call to place your order, (703) 777-9451.