

Narco-terrorism: the year of the coverup

by Jeffrey Steinberg

The year 1989 began with images of search crews scouring an 800-square-kilometer stretch of the Scottish countryside surrounding the small town of Lockerbie, searching for clues among the wrecked remains of Pan American Flight 103. The plane was blown out of the skies by a terrorist bomb on Dec. 21, 1988, killing 270 people. A full year later, new images of Lockerbie fill the headlines, as relatives of the victims, PanAm officials and at least one member of the U.S. Congress, Rep. Jim Traficant, charge that the authorship of the atrocity has been covered up by the Bush administration and other Western governments.

Indeed, 1989 may very well be remembered as the "Year of the Coverup" among students of international terrorism.

In past years, U.S. State Department officials have asserted that the Soviet Union was only indirectly linked to international terrorism. Such pronouncements usually drew criticism from other law enforcement and intelligence quarters, armed with ample evidence of continued Soviet logistical support, training, and financing of a panoply of violent cells. In 1989, the Soviet regime was officially awarded a "white hat" and Moscow pronounced a leading opponent of international terrorist acts.

Immediately after the Lockerbie massacre, U.S. Ambassador to Moscow John Matlock went into private talks with the new KGB chief, Vladimir Kryuchkov, seeking Soviet help in getting to the bottom of the terrorist attack and in averting future "détente-damaging" incidents.

On Jan. 12, in an interview with *USA Today*, Central Intelligence Agency director William Webster stated that he believed that Moscow would share any information it had on the Lockerbie massacre: "I would guess they would. It's a view that I have held that conflicts with many who have thought that the Soviet Union was monolithically responsible for most of the terrorism around the world, particularly a decade ago. To whatever extent their involvement in training and supplying and shielding terrorists a decade ago may have been true, there have been a number of things that have happened in the world to change that. Mikhail Gorbachov's increased interest in having the Soviets play a significant foreign policy role as leaders in the world works against their sheltering or encouraging or harboring terrorists. We've had intimations of a desire of the Soviets to work in the

world arena to reduce the threat of terrorism."

Making good on his words, later in the year, Webster detailed a senior adviser, ex-CIA director William Colby, to take part in a week-long symposium on fighting terrorism at the Rand Corporation in California. Among his interlocutors at the closed-door session were a half-dozen "retired" KGB and GRU officers. At the end of the meeting, Colby and the Soviets appeared together on ABC's "Nightline" show to share with the American public their new-found "common ground" opposition to terrorism and drugs. Even Ray Cline, a former CIA deputy director and chief of State Department intelligence known for his anti-détente views, joined in the CIA-KGB festivities, adding a further aura of respectability to the idea of sharing anti-terrorist data with a reformed Moscow.

The same William Webster, in a September speech at the Los Angeles World Affairs Council, declared that the Cold War was over, and that the United States was more threatened by West German and Japanese economic might than by Soviet tanks or Soviet-backed terrorist gangs.

On Nov. 21, when a sophisticated terrorist bomb killed Alfred Herrhausen, the chairman of West Germany's most powerful bank, Deutsche Bank, and an intimate policy adviser of Chancellor Helmut Kohl, world attention was focused on the "seasick summit" off Malta between President Bush and Soviet President Gorbachov. State Department officials left behind in Washington were, according to one account, ordered to place the blame for the Herrhausen murder on local German terrorists. Under no circumstances was the of Soviet authorship even to be raised.

The Herrhausen crime, one of the most significant political murders since the 1977-78 killings of West German business leaders Jürgen Ponto and Hanns-Martin Schleyer and ex-Italian Premier Aldo Moro, was written off as a "symbolic" act carried off by members of West Germany's Red Army Faction, an offshoot of the original Baader-Meinhof Gang that killed Schleyer and Ponto. These claims flew in the face of extensive evidence that both British and Soviet state interests were greatly advanced by the elimination of Herrhausen, an architect of intra-German economic projects leading toward the rapid pace of possible reunification and the man who had just orchestrated the Deutsche Bank takeover of the City of London's plum financial house Morgan Grenfell. While senior American counterterrorism specialists were privately speaking in unambiguous terms about the British hand in the Herrhausen assassination, publicly the word was out: Herrhausen's murder would be written off as a purely internal German affair and would in no way slow the pace of Anglo-American collusion with Gorbachov.

The Lockerbie paradigm

If one single event encapsulated the Year of the Coverup, it was the effort to bury the evidence on the Soviet-sponsored Syrian narco-terrorist command structure that was responsi-

ble for blowing up PanAm 103. According to court documents submitted by attorneys for Pan American World Airways in federal court in Brooklyn in September, senior officials of the Bush administration were "over 90% sure" by early February that the Lockerbie massacre was the work of a group headed by a Syrian Army officer. The group, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command was headquartered in Damascus. Its head, Ahmed Jibril, was known to be a captain in the Syrian Army in weekly contact with senior Syrian intelligence officials. Jibril's ties to Iran's former Interior Minister Ali Mohtashemi, once the ambassador to Syria and the sponsor of the Hezbollah Shi'ite terrorist group in Lebanon, were also known by the Bush administration by no later than February.

According to the PanAm court documents and an investigator's report prepared for PanAm and released to the press by Representative Traficant, the suppression of the Lockerbie dossier was tied to an ongoing coverup of Syrian drug trafficking running from Lebanon's Bekaa Valley through Bulgaria into Frankfurt, accounting for billions of dollars a year in Syrian profit from illegal sales of heroin, hashish, and cocaine. PanAm identified a Syrian businessman with extensive East bloc ties, Monzer Al-Kassar, as the architect of the global drug-running empire, including the local Frankfurt Airport operations linked to the planting of the bomb aboard Flight 103.

The same Al-Kassar figured prominently in the later phases of the Reagan era Iran-Contra fiasco. Al-Kassar, according to both congressional and federal court records, provided millions of dollars in Soviet bloc arms to the Nicaraguan Contras through business ties to Oliver North, Richard Secord, Albert Hakim, and Thomas Clines.

The broader issue underlying the coverup of Syria's pre-eminent role in international narco-terrorism was summed up in a statement by Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, who characterized Hafez al-Assad as a "force for peace" in the Middle East. Since the time of Henry Kissinger's tenure as Nixon's national security adviser and secretary of state, every U.S. administration has protected Syria's narco-terrorist Assad regime.

Considered in that policy framework, the idea that CIA officials in Frankfurt would, as PanAm charges, connive with Syrian narco-terrorist Al-Kassar on arms for hostage deals and thereby get caught up in a self-feeding coverup of the Lockerbie massacre is not incredible.

In effect, the entire effort to stop international drug trafficking and international terrorism remains hostage to the policy framework that deems it "practical" and "geo-political" to wheel and deal with terrorists like Assad and to bail out a Gorbachov regime in Moscow rather than publicly embrace the anti-bolshevik revolts sweeping Eastern Europe and China. 1989 demonstrated this cruel reality.

It is therefore not surprising that as Americans planned to travel abroad for the 1989-90 winter holidays, they were

greeted by sharp warnings of possible terrorist actions against U.S. targets.

In early December, Spanish police arrested a group of Arab terrorists smuggling large amounts of explosives. Italian authorities began assembling new evidence of a revived alliance between the Italian Red Brigades and the West German RAF. Hezbollah has put out a year-end assassination threat against Pope John Paul II.

For readers of *EIR* and its U.S. and European counterterrorist newsletters *Investigative Leads* and *Spuren und Motiven*, none of these events was surprising.

- While international media outlets were echoing William Webster's claims that Moscow had gone out of the terrorism business, *EIR* warned in March that a "New Baku" alliance had been forged between the Soviet Union and Iranian-Syrian backed Islamic terrorist international during Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze's state visit to Teheran. As part of that news coverage, extensive details of the PanAm 103 bombing were reported, identifying the Syrian-Iranian joint authorship of the bombing and identifying the Jibril PFLP/GC as the perpetrators.

- Months before the Herrhausen assassination, readers of *Investigative Leads* and *Spuren und Motiven* were receiving detailed intelligence on the rebuilding of the terrorist infrastructure inside the Federal Republic of Germany through an elaborate support operation run on behalf of RAF members engaged in a lengthy prison hunger strike. Ties between the Irish Republican Army, the RAF, and the Green Party were catalogued, along with routes through East Berlin that provided Arab terrorist networks with easy access to the West.

- And beginning in November, *EIR* and its associated *Middle East Insider* weekly newsletter began providing the most detailed coverage available of the unraveling Lockerbie scandal, including a complete dossier on Al-Kassar which revealed that the Syrian arms and drug merchant was a top target of Interpol probes and was linked both to East bloc intelligence services and the Medellín Cartel of Colombia.

As this year-end issue goes to press, the Lockerbie scandal has percolated to the surface, in part due to the efforts of Representative Traficant, who held a series of Capitol Hill press conferences in early November and has called for a full congressional probe of the alleged coverup. When Bush and Gorbachov showed up in Malta for their summit session, members of an international group of relatives of the Lockerbie victims were there to greet the two heads of state with demands for a cutoff of all support for the Syrian and Iranian regimes.

This has the potential to be the beginning of the end of the decade of deceit and coverup regarding international narco-terrorism. Perhaps 1990 will be recorded as the Year of the Truth, in which the exposure of the actual forces behind international narco-terrorism ushers in a decade of greater safety and security.