

New holes emerge in Lockerbie coverup

by Jeffrey Steinberg

Five years after the tragic bombing of Pan American World Airways Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, the coverup of responsibility for that terrorist crime, carefully nurtured by President George Bush and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, is coming unglued. And, as a result, new evidence has been surfacing that points to the Syrian and Iranian governments and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC) as the likely culprits.

Pan Am Flight 103 exploded on Dec. 21, 1988, killing 270 people, including a group of American intelligence officers who were returning to the United States from Lebanon. A controversial report by New York City investigator Juval Aviv, released to Pan Am's insurance underwriters in 1990, charged that a U.S. intelligence drug sting at Frankfurt International Airport had been penetrated by the PFLP-GC, enabling the bomb to be planted aboard the jetliner. Syndicated columnist Jack Anderson fueled the controversy when he charged in a series of articles that Bush and Thatcher had conspired, beginning in March 1989, to bury the evidence of Syrian sponsorship of the terrorist attack in order to pursue their political rapprochement with the Hafez al-Assad regime in Damascus, and to cover up aspects of the Iran-Contra scandal that would have been devastating to their governments.

The Aviv report had named top Syrian mobster Mansur al-Kassar, a close associate of President Assad and his brother Rifaat al-Assad, as a pivotal player in the Lockerbie bomb plot. Al-Kassar, in addition to his longstanding ties to the Soviet intelligence services, had been paid millions of dollars by Lt. Col. Oliver North to provide Soviet-made arms to the Nicaraguan Contras and to help secure the release of American hostages in Lebanon.

The Libya angle

A critical feature of the Bush-Thatcher coverup was the appearance of "evidence" in 1991 that a key component of the Lockerbie bomb could be traced to the Libyan government. Ultimately, two Libyan intelligence agents were charged with the Pan Am 103 bombing, Syria and Iran were given a clean bill of health, and the United Nations Security Council moved to slap sanctions on Libya and to pressure Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi to turn over the two alleged terrorists

for trial in England or the United States.

Now, the Libya story has been severely discredited. In December 1993, Edwin Bollier, the Swiss manufacturer of the "zero series" timer that was used in the Pan Am 103 bomb, told the London *Sunday Times* and BBC's Radio 4 that Libya had not been the only client to purchase the timers in the months leading up to the Lockerbie bombing. The East German government also purchased identical timers during the same period. The Stasi (East German state security) maintained close ties to the PFLP-GC cell in Frankfurt, according to official records obtained by German authorities following reunification. Further, Ulrich Lumpert, the chief engineer of Bollier, had informed the West German authorities about the timer sales to East Germany in 1990, and that information was suppressed!

Writing about the new revelations of the East German and PFLP-GC links to the timers, *Sunday Times* reporter David Leppard on Dec. 19, 1993 scored Bush, British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd, and others for their rush to exonerate Iran and Syria, which "sat uneasily with many of the detectives involved in the Lockerbie hunt. The American CIA had traced a wire transfer indicating that up to \$12 million had been paid by the Iranian government to the Vienna bank account of Ahmed Jibril. . . . Few could understand the rush by the Foreign Office and State Department to let Iran and Syria so completely off the hook."

With crucial evidence discrediting the Libya theory, attention is again focusing back on the Syria-Iran line of inquiry. And the Clinton administration appears to be distancing itself from the hard-line stance of the Bush White House toward blaming Libya alone for the blast (even the Aviv report implicated Libyan intelligence in assisting in the terror plan). Administration officials have reportedly been looking at the possibility of holding a trial for the two accused Libyan officers on Malta, where the climate for a fair trial would be better. Libya has apparently signaled its willingness to cooperate in such a change of venue. The World Court in the Hague is considering the Malta site.

Some Washington sources interviewed by *EIR* believe that the Clinton administration's willingness to reopen the Syria-Iran line of inquiry is tied to renewed efforts to draw Syria into the Middle East peace process. According to these sources, the evidence of the PFLP-GC role in the Lockerbie massacre was floated on the eve of the Geneva summit meeting between Clinton and Assad in order to pressure Damascus to abandon its opposition to the Israeli deal with the PLO and its support of rejectionist front Palestinian radicals.

Whether the Clinton administration is using Lockerbie as a lever for furthering the Mideast peace process or there is a genuine commitment to get to the bottom of the bombing, may prove to be of secondary consequence. With Bush and Thatcher out of power, with new evidence surfacing, and with new books and documentary films on the tragedy, it will be ever more difficult to bury the truth.