

TWA hostage taking: part of Soviet war plan

by Jeffrey Steinberg

As this issue of *EIR* goes to press, Amal sources in Beirut are reporting the imminent delivery of 39 American hostages to Damascus, Syria, where they will reportedly be freed within 24 hours in exchange for the release of over 700 Shi'ite prisoners being held in a detention camp inside Israel. While this hostage "exchange" would bring to an end the two-week-old ordeal of TWA Flight 847, it will likely leave unanswered for the time being some of the most pressing questions raised by the terrorist action that began in Athens on June 14.

First among these questions is the disposition of the Reagan administration toward the unfolding spectre of a Soviet "unconventional war" against the United States and its leading Western allies, a war presently being conducted by state-backed terrorist surrogates. As *EIR* Contributing Editor Lyndon H. LaRouche Jr. has emphasized in a series of recent strategic studies published in the pages of this magazine, Moscow has already declared war on the United States. This state of war is reflected in both the unprecedented neo-Stalinist mobilization of the Warsaw Pact economies since the succession of Mikhail Gorbachov, and the global upsurge in sophisticated acts of mass-scale terrorism, typified by the TWA 847 hijacking, and the twin bomb attacks against Air India and Canadian Pacific Airlines flights.

According to the most recent published accounts of Soviet war-fighting doctrine, written by Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov himself, Moscow will conduct a protracted phase of terrorist-led surrogate warfare to soften the West for an eventual fullscale Soviet blitzkrieg attack, likely to occur during 1988. The protracted terrorist battering, according to the Soviet strategists, will blind Western intelligence services to

the final moment of preparation before Moscow's war machine goes into "cold start" assault right from the barracks.

It is in this special context that U.S. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger was prophetically correct when, on June 24, he told a group of television journalists that the Beirut hostage crisis was "the beginning of a war." Weinberger warned the reporters that the U.S. deployment of a Sixth Fleet task force carrying 1,800 Marines into the eastern Mediterranean waters off the Lebanese coast was a "military movement in wartime," and that the United States would not bow to the demands placed by Lebanese Amal leader Nabih Berri that the fleet leave the area.

The fact that the U.S. military presence was not withdrawn, and that the Syrian government, identified by White House spokesman Larry Speakes on June 24 as one of the states actively sponsoring anti-American terrorism and therefore subject to possible retaliation, has apparently lent its offices to the freeing of the hostages, has led some Middle Eastern observers to try to sell the line that the TWA drama is a revival of American presence in the region.

Other more realistic analysts, citing the Reagan administration's failure to take decisive military action against the known authors of the terrorist act, have characterized the TWA ordeal as a death knell for U.S. presence in the eastern Mediterranean, and as an encouraging sign for Moscow's military leaders seeking to profile President Reagan's capacities to make decisive command decisions under wartime conditions. Put bluntly, the Reagan administration, plagued by a Kissingerian-dominated State Department seeking appeasement of Moscow, and an intelligence community lack-

ing any on-the-ground human intelligence nets, failed miserably.

From a combination of sources, *EIR* has learned that as of midnight on June 26-27, Secretary of Defense Weinberger had extracted from the President a green light to carry out a military operation directed against selected targets within the terrorist command. At the very last moment, according to our sources, the State Department, with backing from the liberal faction of the CIA, intervened to convince the President that a negotiated settlement was imminent—provided that the United States assured Syria that there would be no retaliation against any of the participants in the terrorist action.

The anticipated hostage release now leaves the United States free to launch a fullscale counter-terror offensive against the infrastructure directing Moscow's unconventional attack. A failure to act now—before the next terrorist crisis unfolds and while the American public is clamoring for a decisive show of force from the Reagan White House—would be an error of grave consequences.

Who's who among the hijackers

At this moment, there appears to be little remaining confusion as to how the TWA hijacking was executed and who the major players were. In addition to the more obvious Syrian and Iranian backed Shi'ite terrorists, a dramatic role was played by Israeli government factions, according to sources on the ground in the region.

The chronology ran approximately as follows.

- On March 8, a Lebanese "counter-terror" team under the control and direction of the Israeli Mossad detonated a powerful car bomb in a crowded West Beirut street, killing 80 people, mostly Shi'ites. The ostensible target of the bomb attack was Hezbollah [Party of God] leader Sheikh Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah.

- On April 4, the Reagan administration issued a strongly worded condemnation of Israel's recent roundup of over 700 Shi'ites in southern Lebanon. The Lebanese were hijacked across the border and placed into a detention camp inside Israel as a "bargaining chip" for Israel's ongoing negotiation of an anti-PLO alliance with the Amal militia of Nabih Berri. The Reagan administration characterized the kidnapping as a clear violation of the Geneva Convention and demanded that Israel immediately and unconditionally release the prisoners.

- On May 12, Israel responded to the U.S. criticism and to the reemergence of the 1981 Reagan Plan for a U.S./Arab-moderate bloc to resolve the Palestinian question through direct negotiations with Israel. In a leak originating with the Mossad published on the front page of the *Washington Post*, the March 8 car-bombing was blamed on the CIA. The *Post* story triggered immediate Senate hearings in Washington, D.C. and an outpouring of cries for vengeance from the Shi'ite press inside Lebanon.

- On May 17, a top official of the Mossad held the first of two secret meetings in southern Lebanon with represen-

tatives of the Amal, including Amal intelligence chief Riyad al-Jamal. In the meeting, the Israeli suggested that the Peres government would be willing to release the 700 Shi'ite hostages in Israel, but would need some direct pressure from the United States in order to ward off domestic backlash that could potentially trigger a no-confidence vote against the Labour-Likud coalition. Al-Jamal reportedly filed a detailed briefing on the Israeli approach with top officials of Syrian intelligence.

- On May 20, the same Mossad official met with Amal military commander Daoud Daoud to spell out in more concrete terms Israel's plan for the Amal to join in an anti-PLO alliance in which the Amal would assume policing responsibilities along the Israeli border. According to the sources, in this meeting the Israeli was even more explicit that the United States would have to be placed in the position of demanding the release of the Shi'ite prisoners.

The stage was thus set for the hijacking ordeal, with the Mossad, Syrian intelligence, and leading figures within the command structure of the Amal in on the operation from the beginning.

During the first two days of June, delegations of top Iranian political and intelligence officials held a series of meetings with their Syrian counterparts and with leading Shi'ite elements in Lebanon. The ostensible purpose was to take the command of the Amal away from Nabih Berri into the hands of more radicalized pro-Khomeini elements. This laid the basis for a team of top Pasdaran (Iranian Revolutionary Guard) operatives, led by the deputy chief of the Pasdaran, to arrive in Baalbek on June 10 to put the final pieces in place for the hijacking. According to one American source in Beirut, two of the original Athens hijackers, Hassan and Ali Ezzeddin, are prominent members of the Amal militia, with Hassan having served for a period as a personal bodyguard for Nabih Berri.

While these identified individuals represent elements within the terrorist command responsible for the TWA 847 hijacking, it must be underscored that Moscow's global "strategy of tension" is being run through a structure built largely on the unique capabilities of the East German government's Ministry of State Security (Stasi) and its special relationship to Syrian Intelligence. The current generation of East German intelligence operations trace directly back to the World War II era German Brandenburg Divisions and the Abwehr Amt VI. These "foreign language" divisions, spread throughout the Middle East, constituted the core of the post-war East German foreign intelligence organization, an organization already deeply penetrated into the Syrian Alawite-dominated intelligence services.

As the Soviet unconventional terrorist war unfolds and the Reagan administration is confronted with its next crisis, the hands of the Stasi-Syrian combination will likely surface again. The question of if and how the Reagan administration will respond may determine the fate of the world for a long time to come.