

Sabotage not ruled out in Ramstein air disaster

by Michael Liebig and Jeffrey Steinberg

At the close of the Ramstein Air Show on Sunday, Aug. 27 at 4:00 p.m., Lt. Col. Ivo Nutarelli of the Italian "Frece Tricolori" aerobatic team crashed his Aermacchi MB 339 into the side of the plane of his team-mate, Giorgio Alessio, who then himself crashed his plane into that of the team captain. All three planes then crashed and the pilots were killed. Nutarelli's plane smashed down to the ground approximately 30 meters from the crowd of spectators, and exploded in a fire ball, killing 50 and injuring hundreds of others.

For the media and most German politicians—and those outside Germany also—everything seemed simple and clear: a "pilot error," in an irresponsibly dangerous aerobatic performance, led to an "essentially foreseeable" catastrophe. Air shows are spectacles for military-technological manipulation, representing an extreme danger to the population. The Ramstein catastrophe finally furnished a proof of this.

Lt. Col. Nutarelli, 38, has approximately 4,250 hours of flight experience. The "Cardioid" flight maneuver had been flown thousands of times by the Frece Tricolori, over 27 years, without there ever having been an accident. The grade of difficulty of the Cardioid maneuver is estimated by experts to be orders of magnitude smaller than, for example, a standard landing on an aircraft carrier. At Ramstein, however, Nutarelli's plane flew *too low*, and reached the point of intersection with the two other flight formations *too early*. This "too low/too early" at the end of Nutarelli's power dive seems to be definitely established; this was also stated by Col. Diego Rainieri, commander of the Frece Tricolori. Also confirmed is a last, futile attempt to bring the plane up. Unconfirmed at

this point, are reports of eyewitnesses that the nose wheel of Nutarelli's plane was down at the end of the power dive.

Gen. Franco Pisano, the head of the Italian Air Force, stated categorically that there is, at this time, no explanation of the "too low/too early" phenomenon. And, at this point, there is no reason whatsoever to speak of a "pilot error." A large number of international experts questioned by this magazine, expressed themselves no less unequivocally. They consider it to be quite out of the question that there was a careless or, indeed, a "macho" flight error made in a relatively simple flight maneuver by an experienced pilot who is a member of the international elite of his profession.

For these experts, the dominant question is, what external influences on the plane or its pilot could have caused the too low/too early phenomenon? Further, these experts from virtually every NATO country consider *sabotage* to be the most probable explanation for the Ramstein Air Show catastrophe.

In addition to a multitude of "conventional" sabotage possibilities against Nutarelli's plane, the possibility of the effect of electromagnetic signals on the plane's electronics or the pilot, is being increasingly considered. An electronic disturbance of the equipment of Nutarelli's single-seat Aermacchi MB 339 in the dive could explain the fatal flight profile. At least unofficially, members of the German-Italian-American investigatory commission conceded that sabotage as the cause of the collision has not been ruled out.

Whether an actual result of the investigation along those lines would ever be published, however, is more than questionable.

The strategic and political context

Let us turn from the technical dimension of possible sabotage to the strategic and psycho-political dimension of the Ramstein catastrophe. It is clear that, politically speaking, this catastrophe did not take place in a vacuum, but in a context that has been carefully built up over the long term by pro-Soviet forces in the West, especially in West Germany: the campaigns over the years against air shows, low-level military flights, aircraft noise, and "aggressive" NATO air strike forces in general. This campaign required exactly this sort of catastrophe. It fell politically and psychologically on well-prepared soil. We are not talking here about the "rank and file" of this campaign against the NATO air forces, which is recruited from the more or less pro-Soviet milieu of parties, churches, unions, and the diffuse "peace movement." We refer instead to the power interests in world politics, to the cold-blooded, ruthless calculation of the highest levels of the Soviet leadership, which aims at gaining power by means of "covert operations."

We are moving here in an area of covert operations, for which the Soviet-instigated murder of the Pakistani President Zia ul-Haq in an "airplane crash" on Aug. 17 is typical. And we can categorically state here that the potential strategic advantage from the catastrophe at Ramstein for the Soviet leadership is outstanding. The question of *cui bono* from the Ramstein catastrophe has a clear answer.

Soviet objectives

The following operative objectives of the Soviet leadership must be seen in connection with the Ramstein catastrophe:

1) Following the successful elimination of NATO's land-based nuclear intermediate-range missile systems by means of the INF treaty, NATO's tactical air forces are the most important counterweight to the superior Soviet military power in Europe. Most fighter-bombers of NATO's tactical air forces are so-called dual-capable weapon systems; that is, they can be armed with conventional as well as, should the occasion arise, nuclear weapons. These fighter-bombers have a quite large depth of penetration into the hostile territory. In case of Soviet aggression against the West, they could seriously impair the follow-up forces of the second and third Russian echelons, as well as supply lines and air bases of the Warsaw Pact. The deterrent effect of NATO's tactical air forces is large, and so likewise is the Soviet leadership's interest in their elimination.

2) The U.S. air forces are especially a *sine qua non* of the defense of Western Europe. The share of the U.S. air forces in Central Europe of NATO's total air forces in this area is far greater than, for example, the share of American ground forces in the same area. In the Federal Republic of Germany and Holland, the U.S. Air Force Europe (USAFE) has more than 43,000 soldiers and 352 combat aircraft, as well as 27,500 soldiers and 290 combat aircraft in Great Britain. A

reduction or a withdrawal of the American air forces would be the decisive step toward military dominance of Soviet Russia over Western Europe.

3) The deployability of NATO air forces rests basically on the capability for low and lowest-altitude flight by means of modern avionics. The Soviet Union has built up a massive air-defense system in Eastern Europe and in the western Russian military districts. Soviet Air Defense (PVO) is structured as an autonomous service independent of the Air Force. Only in lowest-level flight and at night and in bad weather using terrain-following radar, can the NATO fighter-bomber squads penetrate into hostile territory. This low-level flight must be practiced under the concrete geographical and climatic conditions of Central Europe, and entails considerable burden on the German citizenry. Consequently, the Soviet Union is directing all its available channels of "citizen protest" against low-level flight and aircraft noise.

4) Soviet disarmament diplomacy has cunningly introduced into the area of Europe the principle of Eastern "quantity" against Western "quality," where the NATO tactical air forces are to be balanced against Soviet tank forces. Only recently, at a specialist conference at the University of Sussex in England, Soviet military experts presented detailed proposals for the elimination of "offensive," tactical air forces in Europe. NATO's fighter-bombers were to be eliminated, rearmed as purely "defensive" interceptors, or transferred back three times their range. The latter means that Soviet fighter-bombers would be stationed in the Urals, while those of NATO would end up in the mid-Atlantic!

More important, however, is the Soviet "linkage" between the reduction of NATO's tactical air forces and Soviet land forces. In the Federal Republic during the summer of this year, Social Democratic parliamentarian Hermann Scheer proposed a large-scale "disarmament initiative," the core of which is the drastic reduction of NATO air forces, as a precondition of "successful" conventional disarmament in Europe. The prospective European conference on conventional disarmament emphatically pursued by Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher also makes the build-down of NATO tactical air forces into a central topic. For months, the German Social Democrats have postulated the need to eliminate dual-capable weapon systems in Europe, that is, most importantly, NATO's tactical air forces.

5) Through the exploitation of the Ramstein disaster, the treaty basis of German membership in NATO is to be undermined, by raising the question of the sovereignty of West German air space and its use by all allied air forces, as well as the use of allied air bases. After the catastrophe, leading Social Democratic politicians are explicitly demanding renegotiation of the NATO troop-status treaties of 1955-56. These treaties allow NATO members that station troops in the Federal Republic to militarily organize these troops and their weapons strictly according to their own discretion. Military structure and armament of the stationed forces is the

exclusive responsibility of the allies.

Parallel to the troop-status issue, the example of the U.S. Army's air base at Wiesbaden-Erbenheim demonstrates how the structure and armament of American forces can be attacked "from below" by "citizen protest." The "social acceptability" of military installations as defined by the pro-Soviet minority and their opportunistic fellow travelers is to be forced through at the expense of military necessities as defined by the objective Soviet threat. Conversely, neo-isolationist tendencies in the United States will in this way be furnished with the propagandistic ammunition desired.

6) Air shows are events with an effect on the broad population, in which the "silent majority" of the German population can spontaneously express its interest in defense and its friendship with the United States. On the day of the Ramstein catastrophe, more than three-quarters of a million people participated in the air shows at Ramstein and Noerwenich. They appeared without any sort of advertising in the media; rather, the attendance resulted mostly from "word of mouth." The millions of citizens who participate yearly in air shows, strictly on their own initiative, exposes, of course, the pro-Soviet "peace movement" as a small minority that can be kept alive only by means of gigantic support from the media. Since the campaign against air shows, which "glorify war," that has been emphatically pursued since the beginning of the 1980s, has so miserably failed, a prohibition against air shows is now to be pushed through in the wake of the Ramstein catastrophe. In the meantime, this has become an official demand of the German Social Democracy.

In short, the Ramstein catastrophe could, as the result of a covert sabotage operation, bring the Soviet leadership a concrete, palpable strategic and psycho-political gain that makes such an operation appear to be more than "sensible" from the standpoint of Soviet power interest.

It should further be noted that the crash of the three Frece Tricolori planes and the ensuing catastrophe is only the temporary climax of a series of unparalleled air crashes in Western Europe in 1988. Investigations by American agencies have revealed that, even statistical correlation of the crashes, for example, of F-16 aircraft in the first half of 1988, show such abnormalities that an "endogenous" explanation cannot be maintained, and "exogenous" factors must be introduced. A similar result was reached in connection with the investigation of the series of accidents in the American space program. The shock of the Ramstein disaster should be a real reason for changing our way of thinking; it is high time that Soviet covert sabotage operations, as a part of irregular warfare, be given the proper attention.

Possible modes of sabotage

In the wake of the Ramstein air show tragedy, a tri-national investigative unit was constituted, drawing in technical experts from Italy, the Federal Republic, and the United States. It is estimated that more than 200 technicians will

participate in the investigation. Already, however, experienced scientific and military professionals have identified to *EIR* several likely modes of sabotage, based on preliminary information and initial studies of photographs and films of the crash.

In general terms, the possibilities fall into two broad categories: 1) highly sophisticated sabotage, employing Electro-Magnetic Pulse (EMP) or radio frequency (RF) weapons that could disrupt the electronics and hence the fuel, or hydraulic systems on the aircraft. Through the use of electromagnetic devices, the pilot could have been blinded, disoriented, or even been killed. Fair weather and many possibilities for line of sight against the single flying aircraft would point in the direction of electromagnetic devices; 2) "cheap and easy" sabotage, probably involving a remotely detonated "mini" bomb placed in the fuel tank of the plane. A rigorous investigation of the plane would turn up an unmistakable "signature" of any one of these alternative modes of sabotage, and would reflect different irregular warfare approaches.

Electronic warfare specialists interviewed by *EIR* confirmed that EMP and RF systems exist that could have delivered a killer blow to the plane. Such systems could have been brought onto the air show grounds in recreational vehicles, like campers. Hundreds of such vehicles were driven onto the Ramstein compound by air show attendees. A careful study of the wiring and black box on the plane would provide near total confirmation of such an EMP or RF attack—whether directed against the equipment or against the pilot—provided that the investigative team had taken up the possibility of such a mode of sabotage.

According to aerospace industry experts, a "cheap and easy" sabotage operation would most likely involve a simplified form of radio frequency attack, utilizing a radio signal-triggered plastique explosive device attached to the fuel tank area of the plane. With thousands of enthusiasts swarming around the aircraft, such a planting would not have even required an inside operator. A device as simple as a battery-operated radio transmitter planted in the ground below the area where the stunt flight was to occur would create a transmitting field triggering the receiver/bomb as the plane flew overhead. According to one expert, such a "cheap and easy" mode would also make sense of the fireball in the front fuel area that was revealed in photographs taken of the crash.

This latter approach provides maximum "plausible deniability" for the Soviets, given that any Western European terrorist group put through the most basic training available in Libya, Syria, or other locations would have access to such methods.

Experts agreed that if sophisticated RF or EMP technologies were employed, then Moscow was sending a most serious warning to NATO that the American presence in Europe still represents a *casus belli*, and that Moscow is on a short countdown.