

EXCLUSIVE

# PLO Terror: An Israeli-Concocted Pretext For War?

Suspicion is growing in intelligence and diplomatic circles in Western Europe and North America that the March 11 raid by supposed members of the Fatah Palestinian commando group into Israel was an operation contrived by British and Israeli intelligence to provide a pretext for Israel's massive raid into Lebanon this week.

During the past week, several knowledgeable analysts have contributed essential pieces of a developing composite picture of the March 11 operation.

The key elements of this picture are:

(1) Israel has for months been planning a major drive into Lebanon to consolidate a protectorate-buffer area along its northern border;

(2) Intelligence agency penetration of the Palestine Liberation Organization itself has made that organization more susceptible to the adventurist concoctions of "radical Palestinian extremists";

(3) that Israeli security forces committed extraordinary, and in some cases inexplicable, security lapses in the immediate hours leading up to the Fatah raid.

So compelling is this developing profile that the top security echelons of at least one Western European country are now privately admitting that "the entire Palestinian raid affair and its aftermath were coordinated by (Israeli Foreign Minister) Dayan."

### *Finding A Pretext*

According to a knowledgeable U.S. Pentagon source, the Israeli raid "had been planned at least two months ago, and Israel only needed a pretext" to begin the attack.

A noted U.S. expert on Arab affairs likewise claimed in a March 16 interview that "the PLO has been warning for two years that Israel would be looking for a proper opportunity to mount a major assault into southern Lebanon."

Also on March 16, the *Financial Times* of London, in a feature discussing the background of Israel's actions this week, noted that during the summer of 1977 Meir Amit, former head of Israeli military intelligence and now Minister of Transport in the Begin government, had pushed the idea that Israeli intervention in Lebanon could be used to "illustrate the need for differentiating between political and security borders."

More recently, as the peace talks between Egypt and Israel began to falter, rumors began to spread that a major Israeli move in southern Lebanon was in the works.

By mid-January, fighting flared in the south. On Jan. 16, according to the Qatar News Agency, military commanders of the "Progressive-Palestinian Alliance in southern Lebanon have warned that Israel is preparing to launch an aggression against southern Lebanon soon." On the next day, the same news agency quoted Fatah second-in-command Abu Iyad as warning that "Israel is preparing to launch an attack on the Lebanese and Syrian fronts" the aim of which would be to "occupy new Arab territory, which this time could be in southern

Lebanon, in an attempt to obtain new Arab concessions."

Days before the Fatah raid, the March edition of the London-based *Middle East International* weekly ran a banner feature entitled "Lebanon: Gathering Storm in the South." The piece affirmed:

...There is a growing fear amongst Lebanese and Palestinian circles that the coming months will bring a major tragedy in South Lebanon. It is suggested in various quarters that plans are afoot to put a final end to the armed Palestinian resistance, and at the same time to inflict a crippling defeat on the Lebanese progressive forces which largely control the south of the country...

...Israeli interest in South Lebanon is nothing new. They want a depopulated no-man's land on their northern border as a security buffer zone ... Fighters of the nationalist movement, both Christian and Muslim, stationed at military posts near the border, expect to face a major onslaught either from the Christian forces in the south, or from the Israelis directly within the next few months ... The Israelis ... having tested international opinion by bombing a few Lebanese villages, are aware that they can if necessary carry out attacks on Lebanese territory without arousing much international protest or retribution.

Virtually on the eve of the Fatah raid, the March 9 *Jerusalem Post* reported an assertion by Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Yigal Yadin that "Israel would continue to protect the Christians in south Lebanon from terrorist attacks." Israel is "closely following developments in Lebanon" and would "take such action as it sees fit."

On March 10 — one day before the Fatah raid — the *Post* reported that the commander of Lebanon's Christian-rightist militias had "expressed his disappointment with the lack of Israeli intervention" in the South and even went so far as to accuse Israel of "betraying" the Christians of Lebanon.

### *The Palestinian Angle*

In a March 16 interview, a leading Palestinian supporter in the U.S. charged that "British and Israeli intelligence are carrying out destabilization operations within the PLO and this bears immediate investigation by responsible agencies."

Indeed, in recent weeks, there has been a marked upsurge of anti-Israel extremist rhetoric within the Palestinian movement, and several challenges to the authority of PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat from the "rejectionist" wing of the Palestinians. This process can in part be explained as an abreaction to Israel's adamant refusal even to discuss the Palestinian self-determination issue in regional negotiations. But it is also the result of continuous infiltration of the PLO by agents provocateurs.

Over the past two months, a slew of assassination threats against Arafat have led an unprecedented effort to splinter the PLO and replace it with an "alternative" Palestinian movement controlled by Britain, Israel, and British-tained networks in Egyptian intelligence.

Elements of this operation were evidenced in last month's Egyptian commando raid into Cyprus. Notably, the terrorists who raided Israel on March 11 were reported to have come from Cyprus — the notorious center of British operations in the Middle East.

Also noteworthy is that Arafat was not in Beirut during the March 11 commando raid into Israel. There is some speculation that Arafat didn't assent to the operation and that the Fatah's claim of credit for the action may have been the action of British-influenced elements within the organization.

Along the same lines, the Vienna spokesman for the PLO, Ghazi Hussein, stated on March 16 that the guerrilla raid into Israel "did not go according to plan," since "the operation had been aimed at military targets ... the killing of women and children in the raid was regrettable."

Hussein asserted that "the PLO is not fighting a war against women, children, and civilians but against the military occupying power. But sometimes guerrilla operations do not run as planned. Sometimes the campaigns by underground organizations in World War II against the Nazi occupiers also went wrong."

#### *Israeli "Security Lapses"*

The March 11 event was also characterized by what one former Israeli parliamentarian labeled "inexplicable security lapses" on the part of Israel. So great were these lapses that the suspicion must be entertained that

significant elements within Israeli intelligence *wanted* the raid to happen and to result in a bloody mess.

According to France's *Le Matin* of March 15, a faction of Israeli security with special training in counterterror deployments warned the heads of Israel's Defense Forces on the eve of the Fatah raid that such PLO action was imminent. Despite these warnings, *Le Matin* reports, only very sparse security measures were taken and a special armed unit near Tel Aviv was left stranded away from the exposed area because Israeli transport drivers were away for the weekend!

The Israeli parliamentarian speculated that the lapses were in part due to the recent death of Israeli counterterror chief Amilhai Paglin, who died in a car accident late last month.

Circles in Israel have been pushing this week for the formation of a special commission of inquiry to investigate the lapses.

There are questions to be answered about the actions of the Israeli security forces even after the terrorists had hijacked the bus. According to *Le Matin*, the security forces have been criticized for not allowing the bus to ride all the way into Tel Aviv, where reasoned counterterror measures could have been launched, thus sparing lives. Instead, Israeli forces wildly shot at the bus at a roadside cordon, causing the bus to explode and significantly raising the death toll.

Then, three of the terrorists "escaped" from the burning bus and roamed through the Israeli countryside, providing a pretext for a massive seal-and-search operation by Israeli police units; the imposition of the first curfew in Israeli history for 300,000 residents of adjacent areas; and whipping up of the population into even greater intensities of hysterical rage.

## Soviets Hold U.S. Responsible For Middle East Crisis Outcome

In authoritative statements issued after Israel's invasion of Lebanon March 14, the Soviet Union charged the United States with responsibility for arming Israel and approving the incursion. On March 15, the Soviet news agency TASS stated that the operation launched by Israel was possible only by virtue of direct U.S. support.

TASS was empowered on March 16 to state that "what is happening in Lebanon is not a local conflict, but a premeditated strike against the Arab liberation movement and the possibility of a settlement in the Middle East." According to Eastern European radio reports, "TASS demanded the immediate withdrawal of the occupying troops from southern Lebanon. The Tel Aviv government bears sole responsibility for the new dangerous situation in the Middle East."

"In the judgment of the USSR," continued TASS, "the occupation of Arab lands by Israel and its trampling on the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people create a situation conducive to military conflicts and leads to serious consequences."

The radio reports also referred to an article in *Pravda*, charging that the Israeli operation was carried out "with the knowledge and agreement of the United States."

### Soviet Army Paper: Beware of "Nuclear Arms Race" in Mideast

*On the eve of the latest crisis, the Soviet military paper, Red Star, warned that war in the Middle East could mean nuclear war. The article, titled "The Nuclear Ambitions of the Israeli Militarists," appeared on March 11 under the byline of R. Nikolaev.*

The world press has reported more than once that Israel has at its disposal not only the means to deliver a nuclear weapon, but the nuclear weapon itself.

...At the time of the 1973 war, Israel — and this the weekly *Time* confirms — was ready to use the mass destruction weapon it possessed: the atomic bomb. In