

## Overturning the Middle East chess board . . . again

by Jeffrey Steinberg

It's become as predictable as death and income taxes. Every time an American administration launches a potentially sane policy course toward the war-ravaged eastern Mediterranean region, some combination of international forces stage manages a new crisis—usually via a terrorist incident—and all hell breaks loose. Then, before you can say “Abu Nidal,” the long-term policy initiatives are buried under a mountain of crisis management papers, superpower hot-line chats, etc.

And so things stand now once again. No sooner had Secretary of State George Shultz bowed to pressure from the incoming Bush team and opened up formal diplomatic talks with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) of Yasser Arafat, than a major international terrorist incident, the blowing up of Pan Am flight 103 on Dec. 21, took place.

Within days of the Pan Am bombing, an international furor was triggered over the “discovery” of a chemical weapons plant in Rebta, Libya, fueling rumors that the United States was about to bomb that plant back to the stone age. And so the stage was set for a Libyan provocation over the Mediterranean which resulted in the downing of two Libyan MiG-23s by U.S. Navy F-14s conducting maneuvers off the aircraft carrier *John F. Kennedy*.

On Dec. 30, already apparently responding to the Pan Am 103 bombing and the Libyan brouhaha, the United States had dispatched a taskforce of 20 warships led by the aircraft carrier *Teddy Roosevelt* to the eastern Mediterranean—mission unknown.

And as this issue of *EIR* goes to press, Abu Nidal, recently spotted in Beirut, has announced that he and his 200 followers are fully behind Libya's Muammar Qaddafi and will unleash a spate of terrorist attacks if the United States takes any more action like the downing of the two Libyan MIGs.

### Familiar faces

It is notable that the Libyan chemical factory scare first surfaced in Washington, D.C. on Dec. 19—at a conference at George Washington University sponsored by the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith and the Leon and Marilyn Klinghoffer Memorial Foundation, which is itself a branch of the ADL.

At that conference, Robert Kupperman, a senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), issued the first public call for the United States to take out the Libyan chemical plant:

“It is my view, certainly since the PLO's turnaround, that we are going to see some spectaculars. We are going to see an Abu Nidal and others engage in very serious, very, very dangerous and spectacular acts of terrorism. . . .

“The real menace at this point in time—and I think we've got to be prepared to take serious, concerted actions that may offend some—is Libya. These people have built, with Japan's help and West Germany's help, a substantial chemical warfare capacity. It is not yet in production. They are likely—and the *Washington Post* reported the same thing today—they are very likely to employ these agents, or at least give them to terrorists.

“Another fact is that there is hardly a Third World nation around, no matter how impoverished and no matter how obscene their hunger level is, that doesn't have a pair of Exocets or some other weapon. I think we're in for considerable periods of real violence. Libya is going to contribute massively. I think today—today—we ought to attack that plant before it goes into production. Maybe we can try out and see how well our cruise missiles work.”

The fact that Kupperman's remarks were delivered at a conference sponsored by the ADL is key to evaluating the

string of incidents that now leave the eastern Mediterranean once again on the verge of chaos and war. The ADL represents the branch of the American Zionist Lobby most closely linked to Israeli crazy Ariel Sharon and to those forces most hysterically opposed to any kind of diplomatic opening to Arafat. Not coincidentally, Sharon has been one of the key Israeli back channels to both Moscow and Damascus, scheming to cut a "separate peace" with the Soviets and their leading regional client states that would leave the United States as the odd man out in the Middle East.

The entire sequence of events following Washington's opening of the dialogue with the PLO has in fact been steered in a direction that only benefits those forces.

Speaking out against a bomb attack against the Libyan chemical plant, former Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Adm. Thomas Moorer (ret.), in a series of radio and television interviews on Jan. 5, stated that any American action beyond the downing of the two Libyan jets would fuel a regional crisis that would only benefit the Russians, Israel, and the radical Arabs.

### Missing elements

For his part, President-elect George Bush has restricted his involvement in the unraveling Middle East events to a vow that he will take strong action against the authors of the Pan Am 103 bombing—once hard intelligence has established precisely who was responsible. In fact, Bush circles, as well as the majority of Pentagon spokesmen, have been circumspect about both the Pan Am 103 and Libyan situations. It has been the State Department which has been most bellicose in its Qaddafi-bashing.

Because of the central role being played by the State Department in the Middle East crisis, it is crucial to take careful note of what is not being said about both the Pan Am 103 bombing and the charges of Libyan chemical warfare.

First and foremost, scant mention has been made of the possible role of the Soviet Union, Syria, or even Israel in the Pan Am bombing. The primary suspect in that brutal act of blind terrorism remains Ahmed Jibril's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command. Headquartered in Damascus, the PFLP-GC is known to be a closely held asset of Syrian intelligence.

Jibril himself, according to European security specialists, was a captain in Syrian intelligence at the time that he formed the group several years ago as part of Syria's proliferation of anti-Arafat Palestinian fronts. Jibril reportedly closely coordinates his activities with Abu Musa, the other Syrian mole in the Palestinian camp. Both report to Gen. Ali Duba, the head of Syrian military intelligence.

The PFLP-GC has been active for months in continental Western Europe, building up an infrastructure headquartered out of East Berlin.

Since 1984, Syria has also been the principal recipient of Soviet bloc chemical warfare technologies in the Middle



CSIS, Stuart Lewis

*Georgetown's Robert Kupperman (left) and the man whose factional aims he appears to be promoting, Ariel Sharon (right).*

East. Unlike Libya, Syria also possesses a fleet of intermediate-range missiles capable of delivering those chemical arms to targets inside Israel.

In other words, the specific faction of the outgoing Reagan administration that has been most hostile to the dialogue with Arafat, that has been most slavishly loyal to Israeli foreign policy goals, and has been most enthusiastic for the New Yalta global power-sharing arrangement with Moscow, has been most vocal in its cries for Qaddafi's scalp. In short, something rotten is afoot.

As if to underscore this pattern of events, Secretary of State George Shultz has seized upon the Libya chemical scare to add his voice to the chorus of one-worlders calling for a new United Nations convention on chemical weapons that would create a global monitoring agency responsible for licensing all chemical plants. Given that virtually any fertilizer or pharmaceutical plant is by its very nature capable of producing chemical weapons, such a mega-agency would be capable of exerting total top-down control over the distribution of food and medicine.

This madcap effort to squeeze as many crises as possible out of the final days of the Reagan presidency should be taken by President-elect Bush as ample warning that powerful global forces are out to confront him with a rigged agenda of crises. While sources close to the incoming administration insist that Bush is committed to pursuing the PLO dialogue and will take a much tougher stance toward Israel than his predecessor, any tendency to underestimate the magnitude of the pending attack against the institution of the presidency could be politically fatal.

For his part, Yasser Arafat has reportedly told the United States that he has assembled "lots" of information on precisely who carried out the Pan Am massacre, and has reportedly dispatched teams of Force 17 commandos to deal with the bombers.