

Did the U.S. have advance warning of the Lockerbie bomb plot?

by Jeffrey Steinberg

On Monday, Nov. 6, 1989, Cong. James Traficant (D-Ohio) held a Capitol Hill press conference at which he released five pages of an investigative report prepared for Pan American airlines concerning the tragic bombing of Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland last Dec. 21.

The document contained explosive allegations that officials of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the West German Bundeskriminalamt (BKA), and the Israeli Mossad had advance warning that a bomb would be planted aboard Flight 103 and did nothing to prevent the tragedy.

The allegations hit most sharply at the CIA, whose Frankfurt unit code-named "CIA-1" is accused by PanAm of protecting a major international drug smuggling ring as part of an effort to free American hostages in Lebanon. Members of that drug ring who were baggage handlers at the PanAm cargo area at Frankfurt airport allegedly planted the suitcase aboard the aircraft that contained the bomb.

According to the investigative report released in part by Congressman Traficant, as well as court documents filed by attorneys for PanAm with the federal district court in Brooklyn, New York, the mastermind of the drug smuggling operation was a Syrian national, Mansur Al-Kassar. Al-Kassar is a relative by marriage of Syria's military intelligence chief, General Ali Duba, and is extremely close with both Rifaat and Hafez Al-Assad.

According to European published accounts, Al-Kassar has been arrested on a number of occasions by British, French, Spanish, and other European police agencies for a wide range of criminal activities including heroin trafficking. In one book-length account, Al-Kassar is linked to top officials of both the Medellín and Cali cocaine cartels in Colombia, as well as to leading Sicilian organized crime figures.

Early this year, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's Berne, Switzerland office was blocked from carrying out a major investigation that would have linked Middle Eastern drug trafficking networks centered in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, to the Medellín Cartel, through common money-laundering facilities including Shakarchi Trading Company and the New York-based Republic National Bank.

While Al-Kassar's name never came up in the publicly released documents from that DEA file, some Washington intelligence specialists suspect that such a link exists and that

this was one motive behind the coverup.

Since Rep. Traficant's Nov. 6 press conference, the major U.S. media have imposed a total press blackout on the story.

Whether or not the PanAm allegations are fully corroborated, the fact stands that evidence has been publicly released accusing U.S. government agencies of covering up a major international terrorist incident in which over 270 people perished, including at least three officials of the CIA.

The Lockerbie story is far from over. Just as Watergate festered for nearly a year following the break-in at Democratic National Committee headquarters, so, too the PanAm 103 tragedy may still blow up in the faces of former and current senior government officials who tried to bury the scandal.

In the public interest, *EIR* publishes in full the five-page excerpt from the PanAm investigative report. This publication is investigating the allegations published here. As of this writing, *EIR* is convinced that the PFLP-GC did play a central role in the PanAm 103 bombing and that both the Syrian and Iranian governments were key sponsors of that anti-American assault. Beyond that, the chronology of events presented in the PanAm report speaks for itself, but remains still unconfirmed by this news service.

Documentation

Excerpts from the PanAm documents

On Monday, Nov. 6, 1989, at a press conference on Capitol Hill, Cong. James Traficant (D-Ohio) released segments of an investigative report prepared for Pan American Airlines attorneys which purported to detail the events leading up to the Dec. 21, 1988 bombing of PanAm Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland. Below are excerpts from five pages of the 27 page memo released by the congressman. It should be noted that neither the congressman nor EIR has yet substanti-

ated the chronology of events presented in the PanAm report. Bracketed interpolations, except where otherwise indicated, are as in the original.

Ali Racep, a Syrian living in Sofia, Bulgaria, (tel. 9223294), reportedly arranged the bomb components and their shipment into West Germany in November 1988, via route provided by Al-Kassar.

One reason this shipment may have been necessary was that in late October 1988, a terrorist safehouse in Neuss, West Germany, was raided by BKA/BND. They were tipped by Al-Kassar intermediaries who wanted to avoid terrorist operations near to and which could spoil his CIA-1 protected Frankfurt drug routes. They arrested 14 persons, including Dalkamoni, Ghandanafar, and Marwan Khreesat, and found numerous bombs in audio equipment.

BKA bungled the job though. First they quickly released Khreesat. He has since been publicly identified as a double agent, i.e., a terrorist informing to BKA. However, he is now suspected of having been a triple, working all along for the terrorists. Second, they did a sloppy job finding and then investigating the various devices—one BKA technician, instructed to “check” a radio, thought he was to fix it and opened it. It exploded, killing him.

This Semtex bomb was similar to that used in the disaster.

In any event, Al-Kassar actually brought the bomb in personally. His brother Ghassan’s wife, Nabila Wehbe, traveling on a South Yemen diplomatic passport, flew from Damascus to Sofia on Nov. 13, 1988, picked up the bomb components from Racep, and then flew to Paris. Al-Kassar picked up the bomb from her, and on Nov. 25, 1988, rented a car from Chafic Rent-a-car, 46 Rue Pierre Charron in Paris, and drove to Frankfurt (carrying other contraband as well). He had previously been arrested twice by West German border guards but each time was suddenly released after a telephone call was made. Sources speculate that he apparently felt secure because he had “protection.”

As to the target, Jibril preferred not to interfere with Al-Kassar’s successful PanAm route to avoid a clash with Duba, and neither did Duba since he made money from the drugs.

Jibril chose American Airlines as his target.

It was at this time, approximately the beginning of December 1988, that tips and warnings filtered in. Our sources have identified the warnings as follows.

First. About three weeks prior to the disaster, a Mossad agent in a position to personally observe tipped his HQ that a major terror attack would take place at Frankfurt airport against a U.S. airline. Mossad HQ warned CIA HQ and BKA HQ.

Thereafter the law enforcement presence, but not airline security, visibly increased around the other American carriers, but not PanAm. Sources report that CIA-1 wanted to steer the warned-of act to a place where it could observe same best [sic—EIR], PanAm. CIA-1 suggested that BKA visibly

secure the other American carriers and thus deter an attack there.

Nidal and Al-Kassar meanwhile did not know Jibril’s exact plans. From their own spies they now realized that he was planning a bomb attack at or via Frankfurt airport. They did not have the political pull to dissuade him. Duba was caught between two conflicting forces: 1) his money from

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Al-Kassar’s drugs and 2) his intelligence orders and pressure to help Jibril hit America. He chose the latter. Al-Kassar and Nidal assumed first that Jibril aimed at Lufthansa but then thought it could be American or PanAm. Their spies told them that it would happen in the next few days.

This was on or a few days prior to Dec. 18, 1988.

Second. Nidal and Al-Kassar then figured out the most likely flights for Jibril’s bomb. They wanted to protect their route’s CIA-1 cover. On or about Dec. 18, 1988, via intermediaries, they tipped BKA that a bomb would be placed on this regular PanAm Frankfurt-London-New York flight in the next three days. They figured that BKA would increase visible security, thus dissuading Jibril in case that was in fact his target. So, two-three days before the disaster, and unwittingly, these terrorists tipped off the authorities to what proved to be the very act.

BKA told CIA-1.

Third. CIA-1 reported to its control who reported to CIA HQ, which sent warnings to various embassies, etc., but not apparently to PanAm. CIA-1 thought that BKA surveillance would pick up the action and that BKA would stop the act in case the tip was correct.

Meanwhile, CIA-1 learned from Al-Kassar further information about the special McKee-led CIA team in Beirut. Al-Kassar had earlier, [possibly within a month or so], reported to CIA-1 what to him was very disturbing news, which CIA-1 then had confirmed from its control.

The earlier news was as follows. After some time the special team learned of Al-Kassar and started investigating

him and learned his CIA-protected drug/arms smuggling and terrorism support activities. They also realized that some CIA unit was protecting his drug smuggling into the U.S. via Frankfurt airport.

They also learned of a CIA drug smuggling protection for hostage help deal and that it was known and agreed by Syrian intelligence which had a master plan to blame Iran if the deal was exposed. They had communicated back to Langley the facts and names, and reported their film of the hostage locations. CIA did nothing. No reply. The team was outraged, believing that its rescue and their lives would be endangered by the double dealing.

By mid-December the team became frustrated and angry and made plans to return to the U.S. with their photos and evidence to inform the government, and to publicize their findings if the government covered up. They did not seek permission to return, which is against the rules. The return was unannounced. The team was surveilled by Al-Kassar (probably Syrian) agents when making its travel plans, which included connecting with Flight 103 in London on Dec. 21, 1988. Sources report eight CIA team members on that flight, but we only have identified the five names reported herein.

Al-Kassar contacted his CIA-1 handlers sometime in the third week of December 1988, communicated the latest news and travel information, and asked for help. There were numerous communications between CIA-1 and its control.

Fourth. Two-three days before the disaster a BKA undercover agent reported to his superiors a plan to bomb a PanAm flight in the next few days. BKA passed the intelligence to CIA-1.

Again, CIA-1 wanted to warn "its people" but did not want to blow its surveillance operation and undercover penetration or to risk the Al-Kassar hostage released operation. Warning were sent via the State Dept. to its embassies [these may be the same warnings as described above].

CIA-1 and/or its control apparently "planned" [control was distracted by the McKee team's planned return and events were moving quickly as were decisions] that BKA's surveillance would pick up the action at the airport and then come up with an anonymous "tip" to plausibly explain why it was suddenly examining the checked luggage.

We do not know what if any tips were given to the other American carriers, but law enforcement (not airline) security suddenly tightened even more around them, but not PanAm.

Jibril or his on-scene lieutenants then decided to scratch American Airlines and finally select PanAm. We do not know exactly when this decision was made, but the dates point to two-three days before the flight.

Sources speculate that, although Jibril knew this jeopardized Nidal/Al-Kassar's drug route, he felt that he was too committed to stop and had to go through with his plans, and, in a bit of double-dealing, rationalized that any exposure of the act and blame would fall on his rival Nidal.

Jibril through an intermediary activated the Jafar/Turkish

baggage handler connection via PanAm. For the Turk and Jafar this was another normal drug run. Jafar does not profile as a suicidal martyr type.

Fifth. An undercover Mossad agent tipped BKA within 24 hours before takeoff as to the plan to place a bomb on that very PanAm flight.

BKA passed that to CIA-1 and asked for instructions. CIA-1 so reported to its control.

CIA-1 did not reply to BKA.

The bomb was ready. Within 24-48 hours before the flight a black Mercedes had parked in the airport lot and the Turkish baggage handler picked up a suitcase from that auto and took it into the airport and placed it in the employee locker area. This was his usual practice with drugs.

Sixth. On Dec. 21, 1988, a BKA surveillance agent watching that PanAm flight's loading noticed that the "drug" suitcase substituted was different in make, shape, material, and color from that used for all previous drug shipments. This one was a brown Samsonite case. He, like the other BKA agents on the scene, had been extra alert due to all the bomb tips. Within an hour or so before takeoff he phoned in a report as to what he had seen, saying something was very wrong.

BKA passed that information to CIA-1. It reported to its control. Control replied: don't worry about it, don't stop it, let it go.

CIA-1 issued no instructions to BKA.

BKA did nothing.

The BKA was then covertly videotaping that area on that day. A videotape was made. It shows the perpetrator in the act. It was held by BKA. A copy was made and given to CIA-1. The BKA tape has been "lost." However, the copy exists at CIA-1 control in the U.S.

Jafar boarded the flight after checking one piece of luggage. The suitcase first emerged from hiding and was placed on the luggage cart in substitution for Jafar's only after all the checked suitcases had already passed through security. The suitcase was so switched by the Turkish PanAm baggage loader.

The method bypassed all airline security measures in place. The only measure for airlines to defeat this method would be for security guards to personally conduct all luggage under their personal view from start to actual loading and then closing of the baggage cargo holds on the plane. Only El Al does this.

The special, designated communications codename which BKA/CIA-1 had set up for their operations as described above is known at CIA HQ as "COREA." All communications concerning the surveillance operation and as described above as between or among BKA/CIA-1 and CIA-1 control were made via COREA. Thus all documents concerning all communications described above ought to be marked at the top COREA.

This completes the recitation of intelligence as to the act.