

International Intelligence

Abu Sayyaf 'Factions' Buy, Trade Hostages

Rival gangs of the "Islamic" Abu Sayyaf separatists in the Philippines have opened a regular free market in kidnap victims among at least three of their "factions." While hostage negotiators were working to release two French journalists, who were captured while trying to cover the kidnapping of 21 other hostages in April, Abu Sayyaf gangs were selling shares in what was roughly \$1 million per hostage, in some combination of de facto ransom and pledges for development assistance, which Libya has been paying. On Sept. 9, release of the French journalists was postponed when a gun battle broke out over "shares" in the proceeds. Then, 24 hours later, three Malaysians were kidnapped from a second resort, obviously, to make up for the shortfall.

All but one of the original 21 tourists seized from Malaysia's Sipadan resort in April, have been paid for and released; 22 people remain in the hands of Abu Sayyaf.

There were reports that the three Malaysians seized on Sept. 10 were "sold" to the highest bidders, and the Philippines' military reports that Abu Sayyaf was enjoying a flood of new recruits, who are looking for a lucrative career. However, after negotiations collapsed on Sept. 16, President Joseph Estrada ordered a military assault on the southwestern island of Jolo, where the Abu Sayyaf are holding their hostages. As of Sept. 19, three Abu Sayyaf camps had been taken, but so far the troops have found no signs of the hostages.

French, Spanish Police Nab Top ETA Terrorists

French police arrested the military commander of the Spanish Basque terrorist ETA, Ignacio García Arregi Itaki de Rentería, in the French Basque city of Bidart on Sept. 15. Itaki de Rentería and his wife, Fabianne Tapia, were arrested in an operation coordinated between French and Spanish police. More arrests took place over the Sept. 16-17

weekend, with French police capturing 15 people, 7 of whom are considered by the Spanish police to be leading figures in ETA. French police also uncovered forgery offices in several cities, as well as explosives, including some of the 5 tons of dynamite that had been stolen from a construction firm in Brittany last December.

The context for the arrests was a bomb plot on Dec. 16 against King Juan Carlos, Prime Minister José María Aznar, and visiting German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, who were making a public appearance in Hernani, in the Basque region. Eight grenades were found and disarmed near the museum where they were to appear, only half an hour before their arrival.

Russia's Arbatov Scores U.S. Unilateralism

Chairman of the Russian State Duma Defense Policy Committee, Aleksei Arbatov, levelled harsh criticism at the United States and NATO, saying that U.S. unilateralism has the makings of a confrontation with Russia. Speaking to the annual seminar on the armed forces and NATO, sponsored by the German newspaper *Welt am Sonntag* in early September, Arbatov stressed that the U.S. refusal to discuss further reduction in nuclear warheads, parallel to its plans for a so-called national missile defense (NMD), marked a qualitative change, toward building strategic superiority. The Kosovo war, he continued, demonstrates that NATO has turned into an alliance committed to out-of-area offensives. In addition to Russia's concern over NATO's expansion to its borders, Russia is threatened by irregular warfare, simultaneously, from the south, in the Caucasus, and in Central Asia, while the West is giving it no support.

Only the Chinese could potentially become Russia's partner, Arbatov said.

He warned that should NATO try to resolve its conflict with Serbia as it did in 1999, it would "lead to a severe crisis in the relations between Russia and the West," and that "unlike Yeltsin, President Putin will not make concessions at any price to the West." The political lesson from the

Kursk disaster, is that Russia must upgrade its armed forces, and expect increasing tensions with the West, he added. The U.S. refusal to let Russians inspect two U.S. submarines that had been in the Barents Sea at the time of the *Kursk* sinking, is a decision that will "affect Russian-American relations more than all other decisions by the U.S. Administration."

Reports of ASEAN's Demise Are Premature

Despite the gloomy forecasts two years ago, concerning the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' future existence, "there is life yet in the old ASEAN body, and I think it would be an exaggeration to say that ASEAN is dead," said Thailand's Deputy Foreign Minister Sukhumbhand Paribatra, at a Washington press conference on Sept. 25.

He flagged two major concerns: First, "Thailand wishes to see Indonesia united, strong and democratic," he said, "because of the sheer size of Indonesia within the region, I think that any uncertainty that arises in that country obviously has implications for the rest of the region." Second, the continued economic fragility of the smaller, new members—Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Myanmar—must be overcome "for Southeast Asia [as a whole] to recover fully from the economic problems."

Turkey Briefs Press on NATO's New 'Readiness'

NATO has developed a new strategic concept which will lead to a change in its force makeup, the Turkish General Staff informed the Turkish press in a special briefing on Sept. 22. The new strategic concept of "readiness forces," based on 16 so-called threat scenarios to alliance members, had been developed earlier in the year, and is evidently a further extension of the "out-of-area" concept rammed through in the aftermath of last year's NATO war against Serbia.

FRENCHMEN voted on Sept. 24 on a constitutional change to reduce the Presidential term from seven years to five, with polls indicating an overwhelming vote in favor, but also record levels of abstention. Supporters say the five-year term would render the Presidency "more accountable," than the *septanat*, established by Charles de Gaulle as a counter to the traditional parliamentary system.

RUSSIA AND INDIA will sign an agreement to step up cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy during Russian President Vladimir Putin's four-day visit to India that begins on Oct. 2, Russian Vice-Premier Ilya Klebanov told the press on Sept. 20, after a meeting with Indian Information Technology Minister Pramod Mahajan.

ITALIAN authorities on Sept. 21 released Argentine attorney Maj. Jorge Olivera (ret.), who had been arrested in August at the request of France. Olivera had sought to bring charges in the European Court for Human Rights, against Margaret Thatcher for her May 1982 order to sink the Argentine cruiser *Belgrano*. Olivera was accused of involvement in the 1976 disappearance of a French-Argentine citizen, but the Italian appeals court ruled that the statute of limitations had expired.

SOUTH AFRICAN President Thabo Mbeki and Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika will co-chair the first session of the Binational Commission, in Algiers on Sept. 22-24, and which coincides with Mbeki's state visit. The BNC is the only commission that South Africa has with another country at the Presidential level.

UN MILITARY observers arrived on the Eritrean-Ethiopian border on Sept. 21, to prepare the ground for the 4,200-man UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE). Both agreed to the peacekeeping mission on June 18, when they signed the cease-fire in the four-year-old hostilities.

According to Turkish General Staff public relations officer Col. Salih Zeki Colak, the new concept will lead to the establishment of three NATO groups comprising high, low, and long-term readiness forces. NATO hopes to decide by 2001 where to establish the headquarters for three High Readiness Forces, which would be the first to intervene in a crisis. It will also decide on six additional headquarters for low and long-term follow-up forces.

Colonel Colak reported that Istanbul is a candidate for the location of one of the headquarters. Maj. Gen. Ethem Edragi explained: "Of the 16 scenarios of threats to NATO, 13 involve Turkey. . . . With a headquarters in Turkey, NATO would be able to reach the crisis in the shortest possible time. Turkey would be an advantage for deployment."

French Flight to Baghdad Enrages Anglo-Americans

The Anglo-American oligarchs were sent into a frenzied rage after a French civilian aircraft landed at Baghdad's Saddam International Airport on Sept. 21, without first obtaining "authorization" from the UN sanctions committee. U.S. UN representative James Cunningham puffed, "This is a violation of the sanctions regime, something that we deeply regret and are quite disappointed in, both in terms of substance and the procedure that was followed by France." France is the second permanent member of the UN Security Council, after Russia, whose civilian flights have flouted the "gentlemen's agreement" that the sanctions committee must approve each flight.

French Ambassador Jean-David Lafitte retorted, "You will not be surprised, [that] we don't have the same analysis of the situation. For many years now, we have considered there is no flight embargo against Iraq." Lafitte also wrote a letter to the sanctions committee affirming that "there should not be any cargo flights, because there is a trade embargo against Iraq. But for the passenger flights, the humanitarian flights, the resolution is very clear." The sanctions committee, he said, refers "to practice with regard

to flights. No practice has been established and certainly not enshrined in any text." Resolutions have demanded only notification that a flight intends to land, which "cannot be equated with a request for authorization."

British UN Ambassador Sir Jeremy Greenstock fumed that he would refer the issue to the European Union, where he expects to be supported by the Netherlands. "It's the only instance I can remember, of a flight being notified to the committee but then going against the procedures of the committee to wait for 24 hours."

India Won't Head Up 'Democracy Community'

India has formally declined the U.S. proposal to head the "democracy caucus" of 100 nations in the United Nations. The United States is trying to set up this "Community of Democracies," in the wake of the June 25-27 Warsaw conference, where U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and international mega-speculator George Soros demanded the establishment of a dictatorship of the "democrats" against any country that might resist, say, International Monetary Fund structural adjustment policies. A senior U.S. official described the rejection by India, known as the world's largest democracy, as "baffling."

India, along with South Korea, Chile, Mali, Poland, and the Czech Republic, were co-convenors of the "Community of Democracies" convention. South Korea will host the next Community of Democracies meeting in Seoul. Both Poland and South Korea were approached to head the group, but have turned the offer down.

On Sept. 21, an Indian Foreign Ministry spokesman said that India has always supported the promotion of democracy, but only in a "non-prescriptive and non-confrontationist manner." It is not appropriate for the Community of Democracies to demand a denial of UN economic assistance to countries that violate democratic norms, he said. Nor will India agree to lobby for UN intervention to end a threat to democracy in any one nation, the spokesman added.