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PLO: NEXUS FOR INTERNATIONAL TERROR

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Israel's recent war in Lebanon, in addition to effecting sweeping political and strategic changes throughout the region, had the secondary result of uncovering several central characteristics of Israel's declared enemy, the Palestine Liberation Organization. Some of these revelations merely confirmed what had been suspected for over a decade, particularly the presence of foreign mercenaries--Iraqis, Pakistanis, Sri Lankans, Europeans and Japanese--serving in the Palestinian ranks. Other discoveries, especially the vast quantities of arms and ammunition found amassed in secret caches, greatly exceeded expectations, proving a shock to those who were to be the targets of those stores.

Typical of these discoveries was the UNRWA school in Sidon which had been used as a terrorist training base. The "find" aspect derived not so much from the uncovering of the base itself, enlightening as that was on the subject of UN-PLO cooperation, but from several specific items encountered within: personal diplomas from a Soviet officers' course, lists of foreign terrorists training in PLO camps, and on the walls of the school, posters of Yasser Arafat ringed in Nazi and Communist regalia.

These discoveries alone, the foreigners, the arsenals, the sickles and swastikas, were in themselves hardly surprising (in the case of the arms, surprise lay in the quantity, not presence, *per se*). Together, however, they point to one irrefutable, even alarming, conclusion: the PLO is an entity of many facets and interests--political, financial, ideological--a good number of which have little to do with its declared objective of combating Israel. And prime among these, the truly alarming one substantiated by the "finds" of the war, is the PLO's interest as the sponsor and coordinator of international terrorism.

The PLO's sponsorship of international terror spans virtually the entire spectrum of modern political ideologies; from anti-religious populism to extremist theocracy; from militant nationalism to universalist utopianism. Even movements whose philosophies are mutually inimical actually align and cooperate along the PLO axis. What is the secret of the PLO's ideological versatility? The answer, in part, lies in the structure of the PLO itself: a flexible umbrella of seven mainstream groups embracing some eighty sub-cells, each pursuing a distinct political aspiration--Marxism (PFLP), Trotskyism (PDFLP), socialism (As-Saiqa), Muslim fundamentalism (Al Fatah), democratic communism (DFLP)--all bound by an overarching commitment to Palestinian nationalism-cum-anti-Zionism.

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Congruence of ideologies, though a powerful factor in creating inter-movement alliances, is rarely an adhesive potent enough to unite such diverse groups. The most obvious interest beyond ideology is, of course, financial. The vast supplies of arms and ammunition discovered in Lebanon, weaponry enough to outfit an entire army and overwhelmingly exceeding the Palestinians' own military needs, provide ample proof of the PLO's brisk business in arms sales to underground organizations.

Another common interest may be defined as that of a "mutuality of method," i.e., of the shared means of terrorism itself. Interestingly, though this mutuality of method certainly figures as a major binding factor in the sphere of international terror, the PLO, at the center of that sphere, demurs from the "terrorist" brand, preferring the more romanticized appellation "guerilla" or better, that most recently adopted by the Western press, "freedom fighter." The PLO is no doubt aware of the semantic distinctions; guerillas attack armies, terrorists aim for civilians. The PLO, for its part, rarely initiates assaults on military targets; clashes with the IDF occur en route to civilian objectives or in the face of Israeli offensives. Though the PLO maintains strong links with what can be defined as guerilla groups in the classic sense, most of its partners in this cooperative enterprise are terrorists, in every sense. As such, the PLO not only acts as the nexus for international terror, it serves as the interface between hardcore terrorists and organized guerillas, the former gaining an added measure of legitimacy through their contacts with the latter.

What is meant when referring to the PLO's "role" in international terror? Specifically, the PLO is both the procurer and purveyor of arms to many terrorist groups, provides sanctuary to terrorists on the run and logistical support to those in the field, but most importantly, it offers the framework in which terrorists learn their trade: training camps. So expansive are the PLO's activities in the area of training, that in 1980 alone, a NATO report estimated 1,700 foreign terrorists had received training at PLO camps in Lebanon. The PLO also exports its training: PLO instructors have been reported running terrorist centers in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, even South America.

The PLO's place at the epicenter of international terror was gradually earned over the course of thirteen years. At the time of the First International Terrorist Symposium held in Havana in 1966, that center was situated in Cuba. Only at the end of that decade, when the focus of most revolutionary activity shifted to the Middle East, did the Palestinians begin to replace the Cubans in this pivotal role. Large-scale PLO involvement in international terror came in 1969, when members of the then-embryonic Baader-Meinhof gang received weapons training at an Al Fatah base near Baalbek. The PLO-German connection turned operational in the massacre of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics--a Black September (Al Fatah offshoot) job facilitated by local agents. Subsequently, even the leaderships of the two organizations were integrated, so that by 1978, U.S. Air Force Intelligence could report that in the PLO's overseas operations "probably more Germans have been involved than Palestinians."<sup>2</sup>

With the full backing of what came to be called the Rejectionist Front--Iraq, Libya, Algeria, Syria and South Yemen--the PFLP strengthened its ties with terrorist groups in Japan, Western Europe and South America. By 1978, the International Terrorist Symposium that had been held less than a decade before in Havana was convening in Beirut, with the participation of, *inter alia*, the IRA, Red Brigades, Baader-Meinhof, Japanese Red Army, and Basque ETA--all under the aegis of the PFLP.<sup>3</sup> That same year, the New York Times, quoting U.S. intelligence sources,

linked the PFLP with at least fourteen other non-Arab terrorist groups around the world.<sup>4</sup> Arab sources, in 1979, were more precise, publishing a detailed list of the nationalities and affiliations of foreign terrorists then receiving training at a PFLP camp in Hamouriya, Syria: 4 West Germans (Baader-Meinhof), 6 Italians (Red Brigades), 32 Filipinos (Muslim separatists), 3 Basques (ETA), 28 Argentians (Montenaros), 12 Brazilians (Popular Revolutionary Vanguard), 130 Turks (Popular Liberation Army), 140 Africans (various), 170 Iranians.<sup>5</sup> The facts, by the beginning of the 1980s, had become ineluctable: the PFLP was, in the words of the Payne-Dobson terrorism research team, "the framework without which international terrorism could not work."

A paramount feature of modern society is the sophistication of cooperative arrangements between common interest groups: federalizations, syndications, cartels, etc. Terrorist groups, quite logically, also combine and incorporate--albeit clandestinely--in efforts to achieve greater efficiency and augmented returns. Characteristic of most multi-national enterprises, a single parent corporation coordinates and directs the activities of the various affiliates. In the enterprise of international terror, the parent is the PLO. To gauge the vast latitude and great depth of the PLO's involvement in international terror, to gain a truly global perspective, the study must now be broken down geographically, beginning with the locality of the largest PLO-terrorist collusion: West Germany.

#### West Germany

As mentioned, the PLO's links with German terrorists began in the late 1960s, and were tested in the December 1969 attempted bombing of the America House and El Al office in Berlin. Tactical complicity was upgraded in the mid-70s with such well-known combined operations as the take-over of and the skyjacking of the Lufthansa jet to Madagascar (10/77). By May 1979, according to the Economist Foreign Report, Baader-Meinhof terrorists in Lebanon were receiving lessons in chemical warfare.

Intelligence sources in Germany are also convinced the PLO and the Baader-Meinhof have worked together to strike at Jewish and Israeli targets in both Israel and Germany. Such attacks include the assassinations of Heinz-Herbert Karry, the Hesse State Finance Minister and outspoken Israel supporter, and Heinz Nittel, president of the Austria-Israel Society, as well as the January 1982 bombing of a Jewish restaurant in Hamburg.<sup>6</sup> German terrorists Brigitte Schulz and Thomas Reuter, tried in Israel in 1979, attempted to shoot down an El Al plane with a PLO-supplied ground-to-air missile.

Equally significant are the PLO's connections with the burgeoning Neo-Nazi movement in Germany. A shared commitment to anti-Semitism-qua-anti-Zionism has proved a viable *modus vivendi* between the Palestinians and the Nazis, as the paraphernalia found in Sidon amply demonstrates.

In June 1981, a spokesman for the Phalangist forces in Beirut singled out PLO Security Chief Abu Iyad as personally responsible for his organization's close ties with the Neo-Nazis. To substantiate his claim, the Phalangist produced a list of fifteen Neo-Nazis who were then undergoing training at PLO facilities in the country--the same number quoted by the German Interior Ministry in August 1982.<sup>7</sup>

#### Italy

After Germany, Italy constitutes the second largest theater of PLO-terrorist operations, centered exclusively on links between the Palestinians and the Italian

Red Brigades. Here, the PLO's role is multi-faceted; in addition to military training and weapons supplies, the PLO also serves as the bridge between the Red Brigades and the Baader-Meinhof.

The PLO-Brigade alliance, concluded in the sixties, was not operationally implemented until August 1972, when a joint squad of Brigadiers and Black September terrorists sabotaged an oil refinery in Trieste. Still, little was known about the links between the organizations until 1978, shortly after the Italian police began succeeding in their crackdown on the urban terrorist network. Under questioning, terrorists revealed the extent to which PLO-Brigade ties had intensified, particularly in the area of arms supplies. In 1981, Patrizio Peci, former "High Strategic Commander" of the Brigades, testified to the existence of a broader weapons program:

"All the arms reaching the Italians, of whatever make, except those taken from policemen, were coming from a single distribution center stocked by Palestinian formations."

Security agencies in both Italy and West Germany consider arms supplies to be only one aspect of PLO-Brigade relations, believing a more surreptitious, operational cooperation exists, involving, they suspect, Palestinian complicity in the kidnappings of Aldo Moro and General James Dozier (reports on Dozier's condition were sent anonymously to the Italian News Agency in Beirut). The PLO and the Brigades themselves have done little to conceal their links. Captured Brigade ringleader, Antonio Savaste, in 1982 identified the PLO as the Italians' main international contact.<sup>10</sup> And Basam Abu Sharif, deputy head of PFLP, expressly told an interviewer for the Italian paper Panorama (July 7, 1980) that his organization was providing training for many Italians at bases throughout the Middle East.

#### Other European Countries

Of the same nature, if not scale, as PLO ties with the Baader-Meinhof and the Red Brigades, are Palestinian links with terrorists in Ireland and Spain.

The bulk of PLO-IRA connections involve weapons supplies, flowing, of course, in an East-to-West direction. For many years, the IRA's arms needs were met by Libya and South Yemen, but then, in November 1977, Belgian authorities intercepted a five-ton shipment of sophisticated weapons, addressed to the IRA and postmarked Lebanon. True to form, Irish terrorists were soon training in Lebanon--a fact attested to by an article in the Irish Times in May 1978, and again, in the New York Times in June 1981, both of which quote British intelligence.<sup>11</sup>

The same pattern repeats itself in the history of PLO relations with the Basque Liberation Front, ETA. Eight months after the September 12, 1979, edition of Beirut's Al-Hawadith published the ETA communique: "We (the Basques) regard ourselves as an integral part of the struggle for the Palestinian cause, with which we share a common enemy," Spanish police arrested four ETA members who confessed to having received training from the PLO in Lebanon.<sup>12</sup>

The sheer number and ferocity of terrorist attacks against Jews in both France and Austria would certainly point to at least some degree of PLO involvement. What other explanation could be offered for the sequence of events in Vienna in the summer of 1981 in which, first, two Palestinian terrorists were apprehended at the city airport trying to smuggle machineguns and grenades into the country, and then, exactly one month later, a gun-and-grenade assault was made on a Vienna synagogue, killing two and wounding nineteen?

There remains one other example of PLO aid for indigenous terrorists in Europe: the case of South Moluccans. The South Moluccans, though resident in Holland, are Indonesian separatists, and to that end have carried out a number of well-publicized terrorist actions, including the train hijackings of 1974 and 1977. The Moluccans, according to Payne and Dobson, have also received training from the PLO.

#### Japan

The PLO's alliance with the Japanese Red Army, though perhaps past its heyday, nevertheless remains the classic paradigm of the Palestinians' role in international terror. Patterned on the European model of ideology-arms-training, PLO-JRA ties jelled in the early 1970s when, according to the Lebanese weekly Usbua al-Arabi, the two organizations realized a "common ideological background and a common understanding about the way to strike at the imperialists' interests." <sup>14</sup> Ideology soon crystallized into operations, beginning, most infamously, with the June 1972 massacre at Lod Airport, the hijacking of a Japan Airlines jet in July 1973, and the attempted sabotage, in January 1974, of a Shell oil refinery in Singapore--all combined actions of the JRA and PFLP.

As previously indicated, joint operations almost invariably point to a more in-depth involvement: training, arming, and in the case of the JRA, financing as well. Also revealing was the reported presence of at least twelve JRA terrorists among the Palestinians evacuating Beirut in August 1982--evidence of a possible resurgence in the PLO-JRA relationship--and Arafat's demand for the release of Kozo Okamoto, convicted of the Lod massacre, in return for a captured Israeli pilot. <sup>15</sup>

#### Turkey

PLO ties with both Turkish and Armenian terrorists in Turkey serve to demonstrate the degree to which the Palestinians favor a mutuality of means over that of ends. While both these groups aim at Turkish civilian targets, their objectives are often contradictory.

The Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia, believed headquartered in Lebanon, is one of the most active yet mysterious terrorist groups in the world. The Israelis insist the SALA trains with PFLP. <sup>16</sup> Most of SALA's efforts, however, are directed with an historical vengeance against Turkey, in retaliation for the genocide of Armenians during World War I.

The PLO's support for the Turkish terrorist group, the Turkish People's Liberation Army, if not more extensive than that for the SALA, certainly has received more exposure. The presence of Turkish terrorists at PLO training bases has been well-documented, first in the testimony of terrorist Faik Hasan Bulut, a Turk captured by the I.D.F. in Lebanon, to an Israeli court on July 30, 1973, and, later, on June 11, 1977, in a detailed account of Turkish terrorists in Lebanon published in London's Daily Telegraph.

The results of this military instruction, from the terrorist perspective, have been impressive: an Israeli Consul General and an El Al executive assassinated (May 23, 1971, and January 2, 1980, respectively). Another attempted attack on the Israeli and American Consulates in Istanbul in May 1979 led to the deaths of two TPLA members and the wounding of two others.

#### Latin America

At the time of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the thrust of the PLO's en-

deavors in international terrorism had already begun to shift westward, to South America. A continent whose political soil is ever-fertile for revolution, South America's underground movements were already well-organized in 1974 when the PLO first encountered the Junto de Co-ordinación, a loose league consisting of Bolivia's National Liberation Army, Chile's Movement of Revolution, The National Liberation Front of Paraguay, and the Uruguayan Tubamoros. The two South American countries with the most concentrated PLO presence, however, are Nicaragua and El Salvador which, not by coincidence, are the areas of the greatest internecine strife. Subsequently, terrorists from these countries, as well as from Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica and Venezuela--the latter being the home of Ilich Ramiro Sanchez, "Carlos," master-terrorist and PFLP operative--have received training at PLO camps in Lebanon.

Israeli intelligence sources believe an actual defense pact, signed in March 1982, exists between the PLO and terrorists in El Salvador, under which weapons are smuggled into that country from Cuba. The Israelis also interpret the December 11, 1979, attack on their embassy in El Salvador as a display of the native terrorists' gratitude to the PLO for its unflinching support.

#### Miscellaneous Connections

In addition to longstanding and, prior to June 1982, continuing contacts with European and South American terrorist networks, the PLO also maintains connections with an impressive number of terrorist cells around the world on what can be described as an *ad hoc* basis. Documents discovered by Israeli soldiers in Tyre provide straightforward evidence that in 1981 alone, the PLO hosted the training of terrorists ("comrades") from Haiti, South Africa and Malawi. Strong ideological ties have also been forged with such secessionist groups as the Eritrean Liberation Front and the Puerto Rican FALN.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps the most ambitious of the PLO's undertakings in this category is the shipping of arms supplies to Muslim separatists in the Philippines. The Associated Press, on May 16, 1982, reported the capture of Filipino terrorist Jaime Bernal, caught smuggling 15 crates of Soviet weapons which, he admitted, were procured through the offices of the PLO.

#### The Soviet-PLO Connection

If the PLO is the coordinator of international terrorism, then the Soviet Union is its godfather. The most consistent feature of the terrorist phenomenon over the past fifteen years is that the overwhelming majority of triggers squeezed and pins pulled in such acts have been made in Russia. The CIA, in citing the 6,714 incidents of terrorism between 1968 and 1980 (3,688 fatalities, 7,714 injuries), emphasized that the Soviet Union is "deeply involved in the support of revolutionary violence... which frequently entails acts of international terrorism."<sup>19</sup> The New York Times quotes Premier Brezhnev at a Warsaw Pact summit in August 1973, stating that the USSR is seeking to establish terrorism as a calculated instrument of its foreign policy.<sup>20</sup>

The specifics of Soviet support for international terror have been explored by the U.S. Congress, State Department and intelligence services. In May 1981, the Reagan Administration commissioned the CIA to update its 1976 report on Soviet-terrorist ties. The above-mentioned report, issued in June, concluded that the Soviet Union and its European and Asian satellites were conducting massive training programs around the world for such organizations as Baader-Meinhof and the IRA, as well as a wide assortment of Third World movements, at an annual cost of \$200 million. This information was affirmed a year later by a State Department report to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which strongly intimated that

Soviet support went beyond training, branching into the area of arms supplies.<sup>21</sup>

The PLO often revels in its Soviet sponsorship which, as Muhammad Ibrahim al-Shaier, head of the PLO's Moscow office, exults, involves the training of "hundreds of Palestinian officers at Soviet military academies." The presence of large numbers of Palestinian students at such institutions has been corroborated by the PLO's UN representative, Lebib Terzi, in a 1979 statement: "The Soviet Union and all the socialist countries...open their military academies to our freedom fighters."<sup>22</sup> Further proof is available from the tens of diplomas issued to graduates of these academies, found in Lebanon.

If we are to accept, firstly, Claire Sterling's assertion that, "There is massive proof that the Soviet Union and its surrogates...have provided the weapons, training and sanctuary for a worldwide terrorist network aimed at the destabilization of Western democratic society," and, secondly, that the PLO is both a major recipient of Soviet aid and a supporter of terrorism in its own right, then to complete the syllogism, we may properly conclude that the PLO is used by the Soviet Union as a means, a conduit, for supplying support to international terror. The great majority of experts in the field accept this hypothesis as fact. Robert Moss is a subscriber in full, writing that the Soviets' most sensitive task in terrorism is providing liaison between groups, a role which is competently managed by the "ubiquitous PLO."<sup>23</sup> And should doubts persist, virtually incontestable proof was offered by the former Italian terrorist Fabrizio Giai, when he explained: "Never. Never could the Palestinians have delivered Kalashnikovs and other Soviet bloc weapons to us or to anybody else without the Soviet Union's permission."<sup>24</sup>

In endeavoring to explain and clarify the intricacies of PLO ties with international terror, a veritable wall of enigma remains, each stone composed of contradictions and anomalies such as, for example, the use of vast amounts of Saudi oil money to serve the ultimate interests of that country's worst enemy, the Soviet Union. More puzzling is the increasing support of the European democracies for the PLO, this in the face of what their own intelligence agencies report is that organization's role in their own domestic terror crises. Then, most elusive are the reasons behind what Middle East analysts observe as America's edging closer to the PLO. This closing of the diplomatic gap appears to be taking place despite--or in intentional ignorance of--intelligence descriptions of the PLO as the lynchpin of anti-American activity in Central and South America, or even reports of Americans training with the PLO in Lebanon.

A final question is unavoidable: how is it that when most Arab countries refused or expressed extreme reluctance to grant PLO terrorists sanctuary following their defeat in Lebanon, thereby greatly diminishing the Palestinians' political position, the Western democracies rushed forward to uphold the PLO standards? Perhaps the Arabs know something the West does not know or refuses to recognize at the expense of the lives of its own citizens or the value of democracy itself.

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Notes

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4. The New York Times, June 26, 1978; article by David Binder, p. 10.
5. The New York Times, November 2, 1980; article by Robert Moss, p. 47.
6. International Herald Tribune, May 28, 1981; article by John Vinocur, p. 3.
7. The New York Times, June 27, 1981; article by John Kifner, p. 4.
8. The New York Times, March 1, 1981; article by Claire Sterling, p. 60.
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16. United Press International, November 18, 1981: "Terror Links Seen Between Palestinians and Armenians."
17. Payne-Dobson, p. 181.
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22. The New York Times, February 18, 1981, p. 17; also, PBS TV, September 25, 1976, interview with Labib Terzi.
23. The New York Times, November 2, 1980, p. 42.
24. The New York Times, March 1, 1981; article by Claire Sterling, p. 55.

Glossary

PFLP: Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (Dr. George Habash)  
PDFLP: Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine  
DFLP: Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (Nayif Hawatmeh)