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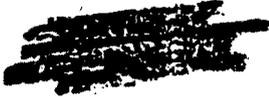
# THE BLACK VAULT

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8 November 1972

  
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SPECIAL REPORT"BLACK SEPTEMBER"

The 5 September 1972 massacre of 11 Israeli Olympic team members in Munich; the 28 November 1971 assassination of Jordanian Premier Wasfi Tal; the worldwide letter bomb conspiracy; and the recent 29 October 1972 hijacking of a Lufthansa 727 jet airliner, engineered to free three Black September guerrillas held by West German authorities in connection with the Munich massacre -- all these incidents pose an acute question as to what can be done to combat the rise in international terrorism posed by the Black September organization. Printed below in its full text is an article analyzing the background of the recent outburst of violence by the Black September group and allied fedayeen revolutionists written by Ibrahim Saleh Hagar, an exceptionally well-informed author based in Rome, Italy.

Behind Black September - Ibrahim Saleh Hagar

All the indications are that Palestinian terrorist organizations, which have conducted a desperate but on the whole futile struggle against the State of Israel for the last twenty years, stand at a crossroads in their history. They may turn their attention increasingly to the outside world, in particular Europe, and possibly later on, other continents. In the latter event, all pretense of concentrating on "military" targets will go, and the whole western world will find itself involved in a deadly dangerous confrontation with Palestinian Arab terrorism.

Of crucial importance in the phase of 'diffused' terrorism which seems to be beginning is an organization calling itself 'Jihaz al Rasd' -- RASD for short, or "Operation Network." This organization, which has been built up in its present form over the past three years, has been



described as the "unseen other half" of the "Fatah" movement led by Yassir Arafat and constituting by far the largest of the dozen or so Palestinian Arab terrorist groups. The RASD controls the "Black September" activist group, which has carried out numerous acts of banditry, sabotage and murder. Black September has, in turn, links with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and other groups affiliated with Fatah. All of these groups, again, are linked with the ostensibly "respectable" Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). A West German secret service report has shown that Fatah, PFLP and other activist delegates have seats on the thirteen-man Executive Committee of the PLO.

RASD and Black September, between them, organized the hijacking of the Sabena airliner on May 8, 1972, the murder of the Jordanian Prime Minister, Wasfi Tal, in Cairo on November 28, 1971, and the blowing up of the Rotterdam oil refinery on March 15, 1971. They were almost certainly responsible for the attempted murder of the Jordanian Ambassador in London, Mr. Zaid al Rifai, on December 15, 1971, for the attempted destruction of an El Al airliner on the Rome-Tel Aviv run on August 16, 1972, and for the blowing up of part of the Trieste oil refinery later in the same month. It seems probable that RASD and Black September collaborated with the PFLP in the hiring of the trained Japanese murderers who killed twenty-seven civilians and wounded seventy-eight more in the Lod Airport massacre of May 30, 1972.

RASD itself began operations in the early 1960's primarily as an intelligence organization, to gain information about Israel and screen recruits for the Fatah. Early RASD members were trained by the Egyptian Intelligence Service, which has drawn heavily in the past on ex-members of the Nazi SS for its expertise. In the last three years RASD has changed its character into something approaching an Arab Mafia. It has carried out killings and kidnappings for money, and has built up financial reserves in Italy, West Germany and Switzerland totalling an estimated \$100 million. It has financed large-scale smuggling operations, the most intriguing being that of hashish -- grown in Lebanon and dispatched in half-kilo packages, gaily decorated with the picture of an Arab commando holding his machinegun at the ready. It has recruited agents in Europe and supplied them with forged papers, and has established close working relations with "indigenous" terrorist gangs in European countries, particularly West Germany and Italy.

RASD has its own "action cells" in half a dozen European countries and may already be seeking to establish them in the New World. European members of these cells have been trained very often in Syria; their special value to RASD is their local knowledge and the fact that they are not so easily identifiable as Arabs. The action cells have been responsible for the extensive stockpiling of weapons, but their purchase has been carried out by much more "respectable" elements of society. Thus in Rome, which is becoming RASD's main centre in Europe, contact is fostered through the Diplomats Club, owned by RASD. Only at the end of August did the Italian police learn of the liaison between Arab diplomats and Palestinian terrorists in Rome.

There is one interesting difference between RASD cooperation with indigenous terrorist groups in West Germany and Italy. In West Germany, contact has been maintained exclusively with leftist groups of a radical kind, chief among them the so-called "Baader-Meinhoff gang." In Italy, RASD and other Palestinian organizations have links with the neo-fascist Right as well as the Left. The Irish Republic is another interesting case; there is close liaison in the field of propaganda between the Palestinians, the IRA and the embryonic Irish Communist Party, but entirely separate contact exists between Arab offices and Anglo-Irish conservatives -- apparently of a relatively harmless nature so far.

The titular head of RASD is Abu Hasan, the son of a Palestinian sheikh killed by the Israelis in 1948. But the real leaders of the organization are members of the Hussein family, who produced Haj Amin, the last Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, and a supporter of the Germans during the war who advised the Nazis not to spare Jewish children in their plan to exterminate European Jewry. Three members of the Hussein family have high posts in RASD; in addition, several members of Fatah's political bureau are related by family or by marriage.

There is a further feudal connection between Fatah and the Hussein clan; many of the Palestinian terrorist commandos have been recruited as a result of having been labourers, and sons of labourers, on Hussein land. RASD, even more than Fatah, has been built up on the basis of a "family elite," which is in no way unusual in the Arab world but is common to other international organizations like the Mafia or Cosa Nostra. One member of the Hussein family is RASD's technical adviser, responsible for murder and sabotage operations; another is

chief executive officer, organizing the planning branch which carried out Wasfi Tal's assassination.

The emergence of RASD as a real force in Palestinian terrorism is doubly significant in that it has come at a time when the protagonists of more orthodox armed conflict against Israel are in a state of despair. The bloody and ruthless battles fought against the terrorists by King Hussein's Jordanian army at the end of 1970 and in the spring of 1971 forced them to withdraw into the Lebanon and Syria. Neither of these countries is prepared to allow terrorists to operate without restriction across their frontiers with Israel, but there are obvious differences in the terrorist positions in the two countries.

In Lebanon there are about 2,000 terrorists in the Arkoub area, known as "Fatahland" and close to Israel's northeastern border. There are another 3,000 on the Lebanese-Syrian frontier close to Mount Hermon. Under the December 1969 Cairo agreement they were allowed to raid into Israel from secure bases in Lebanon, as long as they did not fire across the frontier and provoke Israeli counter-action. The terrorists did not keep to the terms of this agreement, and heavy Israeli reprisal raids have now led to the Lebanese government obtaining a promise of no further military action, at least until after the summer ends. In return, the terrorists are allowed to maintain close contact in Beirut with Arab offices, planning staffs and propaganda organs.

Syria has attached the Palestinian activists to its own armed forces and has grouped them in the para-military "Saiqa" organization. Armed and controlled from Damascus, Saiqa has an estimated strength of 15,000 to 20,000 men. Saiqa is linked with other groups through the Palestine Armed Struggle Command (PASC), in which Arafat plays a leading role and which has in the past tried unavailingly to coordinate overall terrorist activity.

Paradoxically, the efforts of the terrorists to re-group in Lebanon and Syria would, if successful, have the effect of diminishing the threat posed to the western world by RASD, Black September and other murder gangs. Successful regrouping would mean that the struggle against Israel would be carried on in the Middle East itself. Yet the odds must be against a "terrorist renaissance" on Israel's northern and north-eastern borders. Israel's frontier with Lebanon is comparatively short and easy to defend, and the Lebanese authorities will continue to discourage persistent shelling across the frontier which brings swift

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and heavy retribution. And no Syrian government is likely to be foolish enough to encourage large-scale terrorist activity against an Israeli enemy which is only two hours' drive from the gates of Damascus.

It has been estimated that 30,000 to 50,000 Palestinians have been given military training, and elite squads have received additional training for sabotage and murder operations. While King Hussein of Jordan appears to be thinking more in terms of a negotiated peace with Israel, and President Sadat of Egypt has ejected his Soviet advisers, technicians and airmen and thus diminished his effective military striking power, the Palestinian Arabs are increasingly isolated and unhappy with the "no-war-no-peace" situation. The civilised world, at the same time, is becoming more and more angered by sabotage and hijacking operations, and by brutal and murderous attacks on harmless civilians. Yet Rome and Bonn are already threatened by mounting terrorist activity; tomorrow it may be the turn of London and other western capitals.

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The Spectator  
September 9, 1972