



Director of
Central
Intelligence

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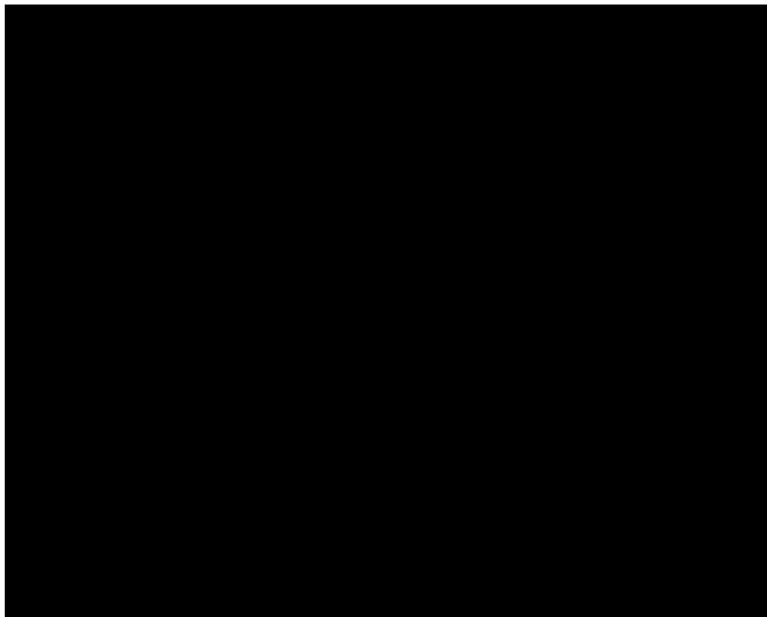
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Special Analysis

WESTERN EUROPE: The El Al Attacks

The armed attacks at the El Al counters in the Vienna and Rome airports closely resemble previous Abu Nidal attacks, but the possibility that a PLO group may have been responsible cannot be discounted. Interrogations of surviving gunmen should yield additional information that will help establish the gunmen's group affiliation. [REDACTED]

Was It Abu Nidal ...

The style of the coordinated attacks matches previous Abu Nidal incidents. So far this year, the Syrian-sponsored Abu Nidal group has conducted six grenade attacks in Western Europe:

- 16 September: Cafe de Paris, Rome.
- 3 September: Glyfada Hotel, Athens.
- 1 July: Offices of British Air and Alia, Madrid.
- 21 March: Almost simultaneous attacks against Alia offices in Athens, Nicosia, and Rome. [REDACTED]

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Abu Nidal is known to retaliate against those governments that imprison its members. Both Italy and Austria are now holding three group members each. Senior officials of the Abu Nidal group last week held discussions with Austrian officials about the early release of its prisoners. [REDACTED]

Among its approximately 15 attacks in Western Europe this year, however, the Abu Nidal group has not attacked any Israeli targets. Although a Madrid radio station today received a claim of responsibility for the attacks on behalf of Abu Nidal, the caller did not use one of the group's several cover names or include justification for the attack—both standard Abu Nidal procedures. [REDACTED]

... Or the PLO

It is highly unlikely that PLO Chairman Arafat would condone an attack in Italy that would jeopardize relations already strained by the Achille Lauro hijacking. A member group of the Palestine Liberation Organization might have conducted the attacks to embarrass Arafat

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and to demonstrate its operational capabilities in the aftermath of Arafat's recent Cairo Declaration. Fatah Force 17 and the PLO United Security Organization of Salah Khalaf, Arafat's deputy, have the infrastructure in Western Europe to carry out attacks such as those conducted today. [REDACTED]

An anti-Arafat PLO group backed by Syria is another possibility. Several PLO leaders have long felt that Arafat's diplomatic efforts in seeking a Middle East peace are potentially detrimental to the Palestinian cause. The attacks, therefore, would demonstrate the group's continued dedication to the armed struggle against Israel as opposed to Arafat's emphasis on diplomacy. [REDACTED]

Possible Government Reactions

Tel Aviv views the attacks as part of its ongoing conflict with Damascus. Israel probably will use the attacks as a pretext for striking at PLO bases in the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon, which are within the envelope of Syrian air defense missiles that Israel would have to destroy first. An attack on Syrian missiles in Lebanon probably would spill over into Syria and involve Syrian SA-2s along the Lebanese border. [REDACTED]

Italian Prime Minister Craxi, a Socialist, and Foreign Minister Andreotti, the ranking Christian Democrat in the governing coalition, will condemn the attack, but they will insist that Rome must wait for the results of the investigation before assigning blame. Both Craxi and Andreotti are sympathetic toward the PLO, and evidence of a PLO role would be damaging to them at home. [REDACTED]

Craxi and Andreotti probably already have sought private assurances from Arafat that the PLO was not involved. Craxi in particular is likely to try to avoid reigniting the criticism of the government's handling of the incident of the Achille Lauro hijacking by insisting that judicial process must be allowed to take its course. He is also likely to insist that Rome will not release the hijackers of Achille Lauro or any other imprisoned terrorist to avoid attacks in the future. [REDACTED]

Austrian Chancellor Sinowatz will condemn the attacks strongly, and all Austrian political parties are likely to stress their determination that the airport attack should not become a partisan issue during the campaign to elect a new president in May. Austrian public statements are likely to include reminders of Vienna's longstanding interest in a Middle East settlement that takes account of Palestinian interests. [REDACTED]

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