

What Russia is really up to . . .

By J. Michael Waller

At the March 13 anti-terrorism summit in Egypt, Russian President Boris Yeltsin called for the world to unite against terrorism. Eleven days later, he had a personal letter hand-delivered to Libyan leader Muammar Gadhafi, pledging to help lift U.N. sanctions imposed for Tripoli's role in the 1988 bombing of an American jumbo jet over Lockerbie, Scotland.

Just a week before attending the summit himself, Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov met with his Iranian counterpart, Ali Akbar Velayati. He emerged at a news conference to declare how "inspired" he felt by Tehran's stated commitment to fight terrorism. For well over a year now, Moscow has been renewing ties with its old Soviet-era terrorist client regimes throughout the Middle East, and forging a disturbing new relationship with Iran. The connections bear the hallmark of Mr. Primakov's long Communist Party career as one of the main figures in Soviet support for Middle Eastern terrorism.

A regional correspondent for Pravda in the 1960s, he did the Brezhnev regime's operational work, reputedly acting as a bag man for KGB money to Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine leader George Habash and Fatah leader Yasser Arafat, whose

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Palestine Liberation Organization then specialized in killing Israeli and American civilians.

Graduating to Moscow, Mr. Primakov led the party's premier institute on the Middle East, shaping the Soviet policy of propping up the likes of Mr. Gadhafi, Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, and Syria's Hafez Assad. He has remained one of Saddam Hussein's truest friends and launched a last-ditch effort to save him from Operation Desert Storm in 1990 and 1991, and today, as he works tirelessly to lay the groundwork to lift U.N. sanctions not only on Tripoli but on Baghdad.

As the last chief of KGB foreign intelligence who retained his post when the spy organization was renamed Russian External Intelligence Service (SVR), Mr. Primakov tapped into the old Soviet terrorist support network to lead his inner circle. At the SVR, the chief of his advisory council was retired Lt. Gen. Vadim Kirpichenko, an Arabist whose long cloak-and-dagger career began under Josef Stalin and who in the 1970s headed the infamous KGB Illegals Directorate responsible for deep-cover agents and operational support for terrorist groups and assassinations abroad.

None of the West's multi-billion-dollar aid programs attempted to induce Russia to break with these worst elements of the Soviet past. When President Clinton pressed Mr. Yeltsin at the September 1994 summit in Washington not to sell Iran nuclear technology or conventional weapons, the Russian leader said he had to make good on what he said were existing contracts, but that no

new deals would be struck. The "existing" deals, however, are effective through 1999.

Secretary of State Warren Christopher has decried a portion of a House Republican bill that called for cutting aid to Russia if the nuclear deal went through. Such a cut, he said, "could derail our steady support for democratic and market reform."

That has seemed to give the green light for Moscow to continue expanding its ties to terrorist regimes. In July, a top Russian foreign ministry official flew to Baghdad to help Iraq get U.N. sanctions lifted. At about the same time in Moscow, as *The Washington Times*' Bill Gertz revealed, Iranian Intelligence Minister Ali Fallahiyan met with then-SVR chief Primakov, to iron out an agreement for the former KGB to train Iranian intelligence agents. Also, Mr. Gertz reported, Iranian intelligence operatives "specialize in acquiring embargoed technology that can be used in weapons programs."

Meanwhile, Deputy Prime Minister Oleg Davydov signed a \$1.5 billion in trade and technical deals with Libya, pausing to remark that his government "fully supports" Mr. Gadhafi's bid to have the United Nations remove the Lockerbie sanctions which, Mr. Davydov added, have "no particularly firm foundations."

In September, the Ministry of Atomic Energy announced a new agreement to sell Iran two VVER-440 nuclear reactors in addition to the one previously sold. Sen. Mitch McConnell, chairman of the Appropriations subcommittee on foreign operations, threatened to block aid

if the reactor deals went through. On Sept. 22, the Senate voted to halt most forms of aid to Russia if the nuclear sale proceeded. But there was no follow-through.

In December, Mr. Davydov initiated a 10-year military cooperation pact with Teheran that includes \$4 billion in new weapons sales — an apparent violation of Mr. Yeltsin's pledge to Mr. Clinton. In January, Mr. Yeltsin sacked his reformed-minded foreign minister, Andrei Kozyrev, and replaced him with Mr. Primakov. Before month's end, Moscow forgave half of Libya's \$16 billion bilateral debt, and Russia's biggest aircraft carrier, the Admiral Kuznetsov, paid its first port call to Syria.

Assessing Mr. Christopher's February "get acquainted" meeting with Mr. Primakov, State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns announced, "Politically, we are working well with the Russians. There are differences, but they are not major."

The same day, the Kremlin signed a \$10 billion energy deal with Baghdad. Three days later, Interfax reported that Moscow was drafting the previously initialed military cooperation deal with Iran. Then came the anti-terrorism summit in Egypt. Occurring less than two weeks before the International Monetary Fund was to initiate a \$10.1 billion loan to Moscow, the event provided the perfect opportunity for Mr. Clinton to induce Mr. Yeltsin to break off relations with Mr. Primakov's old terrorist allies. A State Department summary of the two presidents' conversations, in another Gertz scoop, shows that Mr. Clinton had higher priorities; fending off a Russian embargo of U.S. chicken exports.

If only the administration dealt with Russia as seriously against terrorism.