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/ier« houses once stood is a massive crater, believed to have been caused by the impact of a fuel-laden wing

The US Embassy in Moscow
tells Flight that the reliability of
the anonymous call could not
be assessed. Embassy staff were
advised on December 13 of the
warning and Pan Am had been
advised, according to the
Embassy. US diplomatic staff
travel by US airlines, and Pan
Am is the only US carrier serv-
ing the Soviet capital. Staff use
the • New York flight from
Frankfurt via London as a
matter of routine, the Embassy
tells Flight.
The FAA confirms that the
attack warning had been
received, but says that it was not
at all unusual or uncommon for
such threats to be made.
Flight PA 103 originated in
Frankfurt, passengers flying to
London on a Pan Am Boeing
727. At Heathrow, travellers
bound for New York trans-
ferred, with their luggage, to
the ill-fated 747, which carried
the same flight number. Heath-
row security regulations require

that there is a positive
"reconciliation" of luggage with
passengers who actually board
the onward flight after having
arrived on a different aircraft.
When the 747 went down
there was ,no emergency radio
message or transponder selec-
tion. The aircraft had been
transferred normally from
London Air Traffic Control
Centre to Scottish, and then to
Oceanic, with no indication of
any problem. Then the flight's
transponder return simply
disappeared from the control-
ler's radar screens.

Pan Am has only had one of
its 747s involved in a fatal acci-
dent, and that was in the Tene-
rife disaster of March 1977, in
which the US carrier was
exonerated of blame. The Pan
Am 747 had been cleared by
ATC to cross the runway in
thick fog when another 747,
carrying out an uncleared take-
off run, ran into it at high speed,
killing 583.

The search for bodies and wreckage concentrated in a 20-mile radius centred o Lockerbie. Wreckage was found in six major locations

Middle East bomb suspected
Confirmation that the Pan Am
747 disaster was caused by a
bomb has pointed suspicion at
the Middle East.
A prime suspect must the
shadowy Palestinian group
headed by Abu Nidal, whose
record of major terrorist
attacks is unrivalled. It was
Abu Nidal's men who, in late
1985, attacked passengers at
Rome and Vienna airports
— atrocities which led to the
US raids on Libya. Earlier, in
1982, the group tried to assas-
sinate the Israeli ambassador
in London.

Abu Nidal's faction bitterly
opposes a negotiated, compro-
mise settlement to the Arab-
Israeli conflict. The recent
moderation of official Pales-
tine Liberation Organisation
(PLO) policy towards Israel is
anathema to Abu Nidal.
PLO sources claim that
the Pan Am disaster was the
result of a bomb planted by
Mossad, the Israeli secret
service. Certainly, the Israelis
have been as deeply dis-
turbed as Abu Nidal by Wash-
ington's new dialogue with
the PLO.
If it was a Middle East
bomb, then other strong sus-
pects must be Iranian factions.
Anonymous telephone calls to
London news agencies the day
after the tragedy claimed that
the bomb had been planted
by a previously unheard-erf
Tehran-based extremist
group, the Guardians of the:
Islamic Revolution. ThS
group had carried out "this
heroic execution" in retalia-

tion for July's destruction of
an Iranian Airbus by a US
warship.
The Iran Air Airbus A300,
flying .over the Gulf from the
southern Iranian city of
Bandar Abbas to Dubai, was
hit by missiles from the
USS Vincennes, whose crew
wrongly thought that it was an
Iranian warplane: 290 people
died.

Another possibility is that
the bomb was planted by a
Lebanese (Iranian-backed)
Shia Muslim faction. Like
Abu Nidal's group, the Shia
militants see the USA as the
architect of many Middle East
misfortunes, and have a long
history of hostage-taking and
terrorism against US targets,
including airliners.
In 1985 the Hizbollah
group hijacked a TWA 727 on
a flight from Athens to Rome
with 145 people on board: a
US Navy diver was shot dead.
Other possible candidates
are Syria and Libya, which
are both deeply antagonistic
towards Washington, although
neither can be placed high up
the list. After the US raids on
Libya in 1986, Col Gadaffi
swore vengeance against
Washington, although his
main response appears to have
been directed against Britain,
from whence the US bombers
took off.

Syria is capable of bombing
civil airliners. In 1986, it
masterminded an abortive
operation to plant a bomb on
an El Al 747 departing from
Heathrow.

FLIGHT INTERNATIONAL, 7 January 1989 3