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Israeli agents 'helped Entebbe hijackers'

By Peter Day

Last Updated: 2:29am BST 02/06/2007

An extraordinary claim that Israeli intelligence may have had a hand in an airline hijacking before sending in commandos to rescue the hostages at Entebbe was made to the Foreign Office.

It came via David Colvin, the first secretary at the British embassy in Paris, according to a newly released National Archives file.

He heard it from a contact in the Euro-Arab Parliamentary Association three days after the Air France flight from Tel Aviv to Paris was seized in mid-air by Palestinians and German terrorists on June 27, 1976.

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Mr Colvin told his superiors that his source suggested that the attack was carried out by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine with help from the Israeli Security Service, the Shin Bet.

It was designed to torpedo the rival Palestine Liberation Organisation's standing in France and to prevent what they saw as a growing rapprochement between the PLO and the Americans.

"My contact said that the PFLP had attracted all sorts of wild elements, some of whom had been planted by the Israelis," Mr Colvin added. The message was received without comment by the Foreign Office but later officials recorded that a journalist from the Liverpool Post, Leo Murray, had also told them that a splinter

group of PFLP was planning a series of spectacular incidents to disrupt contacts between the PLO leader Yasser Arafat and the US.

An official noted: 'If, as Mr Murray's sources allege, the aim of the Entebbe hijacking was to prevent the development of relations between Arafat and the West, and Arafat knew this, it would provide another motive for Arafat's recent approach to the French in Cairo warning us of further attacks.'

Most of the file is taken up with Foreign Office attempts to distance itself from the Israeli raid while privately admitting that the Israelis were probably justified in sending their troops into President Idi Amin's Uganda.

Frank Wheeler, the first secretary, reported that there was abundant evidence of Ugandan collaboration with the hijackers. Palestinians had been brought from Mogadishu in President Amin's private jet to join the hijackers, according to the file.

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