

BALTIMORE SUN  
23 January 1987

# The Hostage Terrorist

Washington.

**B**LEAK DAYS had produced bleak humor in the U.S. anti-terrorism community, which was devastated to learn that President Reagan secretly had sold arms to Iran as ransom for U.S. hostages in Lebanon.

"Things got so bad," said a terror expert, "that we thought of putting little coupons in the back of U.S. passports: 'Notice to Kidnapers: This

By Lars-Erik Nelson

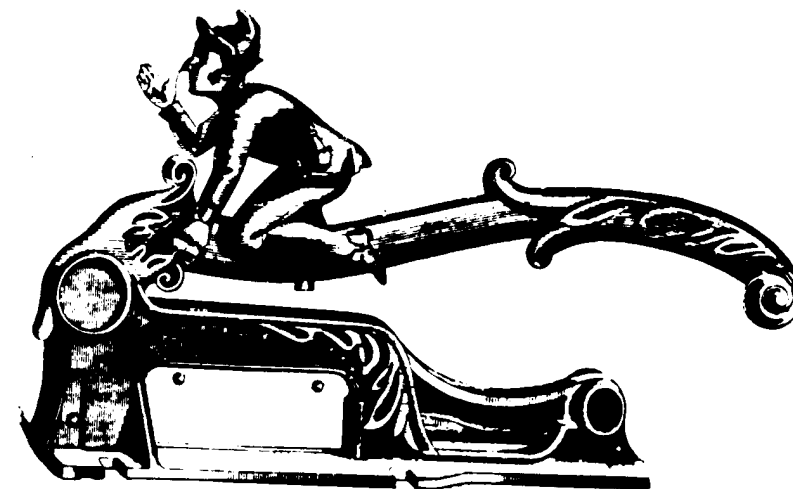
coupon entitles you to a boatload of anti-tank missiles. That way, when an American is taken hostage we wouldn't trade missiles for him. We wouldn't be paying ransom. We'd just redeem the coupon."

Spirits perked up — but not a lot — last week when West German police seized Mohammed Ali Hamadei, 22, alias Castro, a Lebanese-born Palestinian wanted for murdering U.S. Navy diver Robert Stethem during the June 1985 TWA hijacking.

Mr. Hamadei was stopped at the Frankfurt airport with three wine bottles full of methyl nitrate, and the Justice Department promptly dug out the warrant for his arrest.

Mr. Hamadei and an accomplice, Hassan Izz-al-Din, are charged with being the triggermen who boarded the flight in Athens, killed Mr. Stethem with a 9mm pistol and began the 17-day hijacking to win release of Lebanese prisoners in an Israeli prison.

If he is extradited from West Germany, it will be the first time U.S. investigators have had a crack at



questioning an Arab terrorist, finding out who pays him, who gives him orders and what makes him tick. But it is a mixed blessing.

"This is going to be the acid test for us," says a State Department official. "We know we've got the right guy. He's been identified by fingerprints and by eyewitnesses. He's a Shia Moslem. We think he's a member of Hezbollah [the Party of God]. We finally have one of their guys under lock and key." That's the good part.

The bad part: "It's going to be interesting to see if they try to trade our hostages in Lebanon for him. We've never been in the position before of being asked to release anybody that we were holding. Now we're going to have threats levied against us in some form."

West Germany is already finding out. Two of its citizens have been kidnaped in Lebanon this week, and Bonn officials are holding up extraditing Mr. Hamadei until they figure out what to do about the hostages.

If Mr. Hamadei is extradited to the United States, American officials are dead set against swapping him for U.S. hostages being held in Lebanon, but they are only too aware of the political pressures that have been put on the Reagan administration by the hostage families.

There is also some question about how much Mr. Hamadei knows. Al-

though it is common to view Arab terrorism as a single vast conspiracy, Mr. Hamadei is viewed as a low-level operative for the Hezbollah — a religious fanatic rather than a professional assassin like Abu Nidal.

"Hamadei's a grunt," a U.S. expert said. "This guy's information is going to be limited. He might give us a useful picture about what's going on in Lebanon, where he's been since the TWA hijacking. But I wonder how much else he knows."

Ironically, intelligence experts will not be allowed to question Mr. Hamadei directly.

"We can provide background for the prosecutors who interrogate him, but once he's charged with a crime, everything he says is possible evidence," said the expert.

"We're going to have serious trouble getting access to him because of the evidentiary rules. I hope the FBI will let us have access to the interrogation transcripts. We'll find out the rest at his trial."

But there's another bleak joke: Mr. Hamadei is entitled, at his interrogation and trial, to all the rights afforded by the U.S. Constitution.

First among those is the right not to talk. If he has been paying attention to the White House officials who dealt with Iranian terrorism, Mr. Hamadei will know all about the Fifth Amendment.

New York Daily News