

## Materials on the

# Hijacking of TWA Flight 847

Hijacking airplanes was one of the most prevalent and troublesome forms of terrorism in the 1970s and 1980s. This and the following case on the hijacking of Kuwait Airlines Flight 422 raise questions about the varied motivations for such acts and alternative strategies for dealing with them.

Throughout the 1960s, Lebanon was generally considered the most westernized and economically advanced Arab state, with a high degree of industrial and urbanized infrastructure and a stable, democratic political structure. Beirut, with its skyscrapers and beaches, reminded many people of Miami. The Lebanese constitution mandated power-sharing based on the relative size of various religious groups in the country. After 1932, however, no official census was conducted, contributing from the late 1960s to a growing discontent in the Muslim community, which was widely believed to have grown to majority status. In 1975, this internal conflict, aggravated by the PLO's use of southern Lebanon as its main base of operations against Israel, escalated into civil war. Private armies, sectarian factionalism, Shiite resentment of perceived discrimination by Sunni Muslims and the rise of radical Shiite fundamentalism, Syrian and, later, Israeli invasions all contributed to a profound collapse of government institutions and authority and widespread destruction.

In 1982, in the wake of the Israeli invasion, U.S. Marines were sent to Beirut as members of a multinational peacekeeping force. On October 23rd, a suicide attack using a truck packed with explosives demolished the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut, killing 241 Marines. In 1984, the U.S.S. *New Jersey* shelled Muslim areas of Beirut and its suburbs, aiming (poorly) for suspected terrorist bases, increasing anti-American feeling. On September 6, the U.S. vetoed a U.N. Security Council resolution condemning Israel's actions in Lebanon. On September 20, a suicide attack destroyed the U.S. Embassy Annex in East Beirut. U.S. forces were then pulled out of Lebanon.

In the spring of 1985, Israel slowly pulled its forces out of southern Lebanon. In the process, several hundred Lebanese were taken prisoner and detained in the Atlit prison camp in northern Israel. Meanwhile, on May 20, Israel released 1,150 Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails in exchange for the return from the PLO of 3 captured Israeli soldiers.

On June 11, Shiite gunmen hijacked a Jordanian airliner carrying 74 passengers, apparently to protest an Arab League call for an immediate cease-fire in the raging Shiite-Palestinian fighting in Lebanon and a withdrawal of Shiite forces from certain areas. On June 12, the hostages were freed, and the plane was blown up at Beirut Airport. On June 13, a Palestinian hijacked a Middle East Airlines plane in Cyprus, apparently in retaliation for the Shiite hijacking. The plane flew to Amman, Jordan, where the hijacker was arrested. Then, on June 14, TWA Flight 847, bound from Athens to Rome, was hijacked.

## **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

### **The Hijacking of TWA Flight 847**

Hafez al-Assad, President of Syria

Ali Atwa, 21 year-old Lebanese accomplice to the hijackers and member of Islamic Holy War, the most radical faction of the Shiite Moslems

Hayim Bar-Lev, Israeli Police Minister

Chadli Benjedid, Leader of Algeria

Nabih Berri, Leader of Amal, a faction of the Shiite Moslems; Justice Minister of Lebanese Government; Chief Negotiator for the Hijackers

Richard R. Burt, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs

Javier Peres de Cuellar, United Nations Secretary General

Bernard Kalb, U.S. State Department Spokesman

Ahmed Karbeia, 20 year-old hijacker, member of terrorist group Islamic Holy War, the most radical faction of the Shiite Moslems

Robert C. McFarlane, U.S. National Security Advisor

Robert O. Oakley, Head of Anti-Terrorist Office at the U.S. State Department

Shimon Peres, Prime Minister of Israel

Yitzhak Rabin, Israeli Minister of Defense

Arnold L. Raphel, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs

Ronald Reagan, President of the United States

George P. Shultz, U.S. Secretary of State

Oleg M. Sokolov, #2 Diplomat at the Soviet Embassy in Washington

Robert D. Stethem, 23 year-old U.S. Naval Diver, passenger on TWA Flight 847, killed by hijackers

Captain John Testrake, Commander of TWA Flight 847

Ali Yunes, 20 year-old hijacker, member of terrorist group Islamic Holy War, the most radical faction of the Shiite Moslems

## CHRONOLOGY

### The Hijacking of TWA Flight 847

#### **Prelude:**

- 1982** U.S. Marines enter Beirut as members of a multinational peace-keeping force.
- October 23 Suicide bomber demolishes U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut, killing 241 Marines.
- 1984** *U.S.S. New Jersey* fires on Moslem Beirut and its suburbs, causing increased anti-American feelings. U.S. neutrality in the area is questioned.
- September 6 The U.S. vetoes a U.N. resolution condemning Israel's attacks in Lebanon.
- September 20 A suicide bomber destroys the U.S. Embassy Annex in East Beirut. American forces begin to pull out of Lebanon.
- 1985**
- February-  
June Israel pulls out of Lebanon, taking several hundred hostages, most of them Shiites, as security for the departing troops. The Israelis imprison these hostages in the Atlit prison camp in northern Israel instead of returning them after the withdrawal.
- May 20 Israel trades 1,150 Palestinian prisoners for 3 Israeli soldiers.
- June 11 A Jordanian airliner, carrying 74 passengers, is hijacked by Shiite gunmen in Beirut. The action is seen as response to a call by the Arab League for an immediate cease-fire in and around Beirut and for the immediate withdrawal of Shiite militiamen from the sites.
- June 12 Hijackers free their hostages, blow up the plane and escape.
- June 13 Palestinian hijacks a Middle East Airlines plane in Cyprus in retaliation for the Shiite hijacking. Flown to Amman, the hijacker is arrested; King Hussein's brother denounces both hijackings.
- June 14 TWA Flight 847 is hijacked and forced to fly to Beirut and then to Algiers; small groups of hostages are released at each of the two stops. The plane again flies to Beirut (where 23 year-old U.S. passenger Robert D. Stethem is shot and killed) and back to Algiers.
- Ali Atwa is captured at Athens airport and confesses to being an accomplice to the hijackers, Ahmed Karbeia and Ali Yunes. He says he is a member of the religious fundamentalist organization Islamic Holy War.

- The hijackers announce their demands in Algiers.
- June 15 U.S. commando unit reportedly sent to Mediterranean.
- U.S. contacts Red Cross and Algerian, Syrian, and Israeli governments to help resolve the crisis peacefully.
- Israel says it will consider releasing the more than 700 Lebanese Shiites it holds in exchange for the freedom of the U.S. hostages if the U.S. formally requests it to do so.
- June 16 Hijackers free more than 60 hostages in Algiers, and announce that "the price will be paid" unless the Shiite Moslem prisoners are freed by Israel by the time they reach Beirut. They then force the plane to fly to Beirut for a third time, where negotiations begin.
- Nabih Berri, the leader of Amal, a major Shiite Moslem faction, says he is negotiating for a Red Cross airlift of the prisoners at Atlit.
- June 17 The hostages are removed from the plane on Berri's order and guarded at an unknown site. Some of the crew remains aboard.
- The U.S. tells Nabih Berri that he is the key to successful negotiations for the release of the hostages.
- June 18 Israel stresses that, despite previous plans to free the Atlit prisoners, it will no longer consider their release unless the U.S. makes a formal appeal.
- June 19 The Reagan Administration warns the Shiite leaders that they will become global "outcasts" if the hostages are not released.
- June 21 Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres and U.S. Secretary of State George P. Shultz, in a telephone conversation, agree on the importance of not giving in to the hijackers' demands.
- June 23 Israel releases 31 Shiite prisoners from the Atlit camp.
- June 30 Remaining hostages are released.
- July 3 300 Shite prisoners released from Atlit camp.
- September 10 Last of several groups of Shiite prisoners released from Atlit camp.

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