

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 PARIS 19568 01 OF 04 032045Z

73

ACTION SCCT-01

INFO OCT-01 AF-08 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 CCO-00 CIAE-00

DODE-00 DOTE-00 EB-07 H-02 INR-07 IO-13 L-03 NSAE-00

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2647
INFO AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY ROME
USMISSION USUN
AMEMBASSY BERN
AMEMBASSY ATHENS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 PARIS 19568

E.O.11652:

TAGS: PINS

SUBJ: AIR FRANCE HIJACKING

REFS: A. BONN 11294, B. PARIS 19227,

C. PARIS 19328, D. PARIS 19871

1. THE FOLLOWING IS A COMPOSITE REPORT ON SOME OF THE ASPECTS OF THE RECENT HIJACKING OF THE AIR FRANCE AIRBUS BASED ON CONVERSATIONS WITH A NUMBER OF THE AMERICANS WHO WERE RELEASED. THEIR ACCOUNTS WERE GENERALLY CONGRUENT AND COINCIDE WITH THE REPORTS FROM THE GERMAN EMBASSY IN KAMPALA (REF. A). SINCE MANY ASPECTS ARE A MATTER OF IMPRESSION RATHER THAN FIRM OBSERVATION, THERE ARE SOME DIFFERENCES IN THE ACCOUNTS, WHICH WE NOTE. WE GO OVER SOME OF THE SAME
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 PARIS 19568 01 OF 04 032045Z

GROUND COVERED IN THE ACCOUNTS IN REFS B, C AND D.

THERE IS SOME CONFUSION OVER NOMENCLATURE FOR THE THREE ELEMENTS INVOLVED IN THE HIJACKING. ALL THE AMERICANS REFERRED TO MEMBERS OF ALL THREE AS PLO PRESUMABLY SINCE ENGLISH SPEAKING GERMANS WITH WHOM THEY HAD MOST CONTACT SAID THEY WORKED FOR PLO. BUT THE ARABS ON THE GROUND WHO WERE APPARENTLY IN CHARGE OF THE WHOLE CHE GUEVARA COMMANDO GROUP MADE THE DISTINCTION AND SPECIFIED THEY WORKED FOR PFLP AND NOT PLO. GERMANS PERHAPS DID NOT UNDERSTAND THE DISTINCTION.

2. RETAINED AMERICANS. SOME OF THE AMERICANS HAD IDENTIFIED GEORGE AND RENE KARFUNKEL AS AMERICANS AND WERE AWARE THAT THEY HAD ONLY AMERICAN PASSPORTS AND HAD BEEN IN ISRAEL ONLY BRIEFLY. NO ONE HAD A SATISFACTORY EXPLANATION OF WHY THE KARFUNKELS HAD NOT BEEN RELEASED WITH THE OTHER AMERICANS. THE KARFUNKELS APPEARED VERY ORTHODOX, ATE ONLY KOSHER FOOD AND WERE SEATED WITH THE ISRAELIS ABOARD THE PLANE AND REMAINED WITH THEM EVEN ON THE GROUND BECAUSE THE COMMANDOS PERMITTED THEM TO PREPARE KOSHER FOOD. HOWEVER, THE COMMANDOS GENERALLY WORKED FROM THE DOCUMENTS WHICH THEY HAD COLLECTED AND THE PRINTED CARDS (IN ARABIC) WHICH THEY HAD EACH PASSENGER FILL OUT. THE COMMANDOS WERE THEREFORE WELL AWARE THAT THE KARFUNKELS HAD AMERICAN PASSPORTS ONLY. ONE AMERICAN SUGGESTED THAT THEIR FLAUNTING OF THEIR JEWISHNESS MIGHT HAVE ALIENATED SOME OF THE ARABS IN THE COMMANDOS. ON THE OTHER HAND, OTHERS THOUGHT THEIR RETENTION MIGHT HAVE BEEN JUST AN OVERSIGHT. AS FOR JANET ALMOG, NONE OF THE AMERICANS WE HAVE QUESTIONED WERE AWARE OF HER PRESENCE. SHE WAS PROBABLY RETAINED ON THE BASIS OF HER ISRAELI DOCUMENTATION (AS WERE THE FRENCH/ISRAELI DUAL NATIONALS) IN ADDITION TO HER BEING SEATED WITH THE ISRAELIS. THE AMERICANS NOTED THAT THE DUAL NATIONALS HAD MADE NO ATTEMPTS TO DESTROY OR DISCARD THE EVIDENCE OF THEIR ISRAELI CITIZENSHIP ALTHOUGH OTHERS HAD DESTROYED SOME COMPROMISING DOCUMENTATION SUCH AS PRESS CARDS. HIJACKERS WHILE STILL ON PLANE WARNED THAT QTE ANYONE WHO DESTROYED IDENTITY DOCUMENTS WOULD BE SEVERELY PUNISHED END QTE.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 PARIS 19568 01 OF 04 032045Z

3. ROLE OF THE HIJACKERS. THE AMERICANS INVARIABLY WERE OF THE IMPRESSION THAT THERE WERE TWO GERMANS AND TWO RATHER INEXPERIENCED YOUNG ARABS WHO HAD TAKEN OVER THE PLANE SHORTLY AFTER TAKEOFF FROM ATHENS. THE GERMAN MAN, BASIL CODE NAME KUBESKY - AFTER GERMAN TERRORIST KILLED 1973, WAS THE OBVIOUS LEADER OF THE HIJACK GROUP ALTHOUGH THE WOMAN WAS OFTEN THE MOST

VIRULENT. WE REFER TO THE WOMAN AS QTE GERMAN END QTE
BECAUSE THE AMERICANS ALL DID. SHE SPEAKS ENGLISH WITH
A DECIDED GERMAN ACCENT. SOME SOURCES, HOWEVER, HAVE

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 PARIS 19568 02 OF 04 032050Z

73

ACTION SCCT-01

INFO OCT-01 AF-08 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 CCO-00 CIAE-00

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 04 PARIS 19568

BEEN ABLE TO IDENTIFY HER AS TURKISH TERRORIST, BERGAS
ETURK (PARIS 19514). BASIL WAS OBVIOUSLY MORE
TECHNICALLY EXPERIENCED THAN THE YOUNG ARABS AND HELPED
THEM ASSEMBLE THE BOMBS WITH WHICH THEY THREATENED TO
BIOW UP THE AIRCRAFT. SOME AMERICANS CONSIDERED THE
GERMANS TO BE SINCERE REVOLUTIONARIES WHO WERE NOT
WORKING MERELY FOR THE ACCOUNT OF THE PFLP OR PLO, BUT
ALSO TO FREE THEIR COLLEAGUES IMPRISONED IN GERMANY

WHOM THEY APPEARED TO KNOW PERSONALLY. OTHERS THOUGHT THAT THEY MIGHT BE BASICALLY MERCENARIES AND THAT THE REAL LEADERS OF THE PFLP OR PLO WOULD NOT PUSH FOR THE RELEASE OF THEIR GERMAN FRIENDS. ON THE GROUND, THE FOUR PLO WHO MOVED IN WHEN THEY REACHED ENTEBBE ASSUMED
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 PARIS 19568 02 OF 04 032050Z

PRINCIPAL COMMAND, BUT SOME CONSIDERED THAT QTE BASIL END QTE CONTINUED TO BE QTE GENERAL MANAGER END QTE OF THE GROUP AND WAS ABLE TO MAKE A MAJOR INPUT INTO THE DECISIONS AS TO WHO SHOULD BE RELEASED, FOR EXAMPLE. AT ALL EVENTS, THE GERMANS WERE VERY VOLUBLE IN THEIR DISCUSSION OF THE NECESSITY OF WORLD REVOLUTION, OVERTURNING WORLD IMPERIALISM AND CAPITALISM, AND PUT ON A GOOD SHOW IN SUPPORT OF THE IDEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THEIR JOINING WITH THE OPPRESSED PALESTINIAN PEOPLE.

4. ROLE OF THE FOUR ARAB LEADERS IN UGANDA: THE PASSENGERS FOUND THE FOUR ARAB FIGURES WHO JOINED THE GROUP WHEN IT LANDED IN ENTEBBE TO BE MORE AUTHORITATIVE AND MUCH TOUGHER THAN THE FOUR HIJACKERS. ALSO, WHILE THE GERMANS IN LAR FREQUENTLY EMPHASIZED THAT THEY WERE NOT RACIST (I.E. ANTI-JEW), THEY WERE ANTI-ZIONIST. THE FOUR ARAB FIGURES WERE HOWEVER, CLEARLY ANTI-JEW AND TOOK A CERTAIN SADISTIC PLEASURE IN FORCING THE OLD JEWISH PASSENGERS TO PLEAD TO BE AMONG THOSE SENT TO FRANCE. TWO OF THIS GROUP WERE TALL, ONE VERY HEAVY (OVER 200 POUNDS) AND WORE BLACK MOUSTACHES. A SHORT HEAVY-SET MAN WITH A COMICAL FACE, AS THOUGH HE WERE WEARING THE STEREOTYPED BIG NOSE/HORN RIMMED GLASSES MASK, APPEARED TO BE THE MOST INFLUENTIAL. ALTHOUGH MOST AMERICANS REFERRED TO THEM AS ARABS, ONE COMMENTED THAT SHE HAD GATHERED HE WAS A PERUVIAN -- AND HE SPOKE SPANISH AS WELL AS ENGLISH AND FRENCH. ANOTHER AMERICAN SAID HE HAD KNOWN LATIN AMERICANS AND WAS SURE HE WAS MORE LIKELY A LEBANESE. ENGLISH WAS THE LANGUAGE USED BETWEEN THE ARABS AND THE GERMANS, AND AFTER THE ARRIVAL IN UGANDA, MOST CONVERSATIONS AMONG THE COMMANDO MEMBERS WERE CONDUCTED OUTSIDE THE HEARING OF THE PASSENGERS. COMMANDOS SET UP AN QTE OFFICE END QTE IN THE CORNER OF THE ROOM WHERE THEY DISCUSSED MATTERS. THE FOUR HIJACKERS WERE NOT ALWAYS INVITED TO THESE MEETINGS ALTHOUGH ONLY QTE BASIL END QTE APPARENTLY DID NOT SPEAK ARABIC. GESTURES WERE THE PRINCIPAL MEANS OF COMMUNICATION WHEN WITH THE PRISONERS. THESE FOUR ARABS APPEARED TO BE KNOWN BY SIGHT (PERHAPS THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHS) TO THE TWO GERMANS WHO VISIBLY SHOWED THEIR
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 PARIS 19568 02 OF 04 032050Z

RELIEF WHEN THEY APPROACHED THE PLANE AN HOUR OR MORE AFTER IT LANDED. IT WAS NOT CLEAR, HOWEVER, WHETHER THEY WERE PFLP REPS WHO WERE STATIONED IN UGANDA OR HAD COME IN FOR THE OCCASION. FOUR ARABS NEVER SEEMED TAKE TWO YOUNG SELF-PROFESSED PALESTINIANS INTO THEIR CONFIDENCE.

5. ROLE OF AMIN. WITHOUT EXCEPTION THE AMERICANS FOUND AMIN REPELLENT AND DUPLICITOUS IN HIS TREATMENT OF THE PRISONERS. HE CLAIMED CREDIT FOR EVERYTHING WHICH BENEFITTED THE PRISONERS FROM THE FOOD AND MATTRESSES WHICH WERE SUPPLIED TO THE MORE CONCILIATORY ACTIONS OF THE HIJACKERS. THE PLO FIGURES ALSO WENT OUT OF THEIR WAY TO GIVE CREDIT TO AMIN, WHAT APPEARED TO BE PART OF THEIR EFFORT TO MAINTAIN HIS SUPPORT. ALL AGREED THAT AMIN HAD PROBABLY LEARNED THAT UGANDA WAS THE PLANE'S DESTINATION BEFORE IT LANDED, AND SOME SPECULATED THAT HE HAD BEEN AWARE OF THE PLOT BEFORE THE HIJACKING. BASIL SAID WHEN THEY LEFT LIBYA FOR UGANDA THAT PERHAPS AMIN WOULD BE AT THE AIRPORT WAITING FOR THEM. THE PLANE TAXIED AROUND THE FIELD FOR ABOUT AN HOUR BEFORE BASIL GOT OFF THE PLANE AND MADE JOYFUL CONTACT WITH THE FOUR WAITING ARAB FIGURES, BUT SOME AMERICANS THOUGHT THAT THE DELAY COULD HAVE BEEN BECAUSE THEY WERE EXPECTED AT KAMPALA AIRPORT OR THAT THERE HAD BEEN SOME DELAY IN GETTING TOGETHER THE ARAB FIGURES AND THE UGANDAN TROOPS. IT WAS CLEAR THAT AMIN GAVE SUPPORT TO THE COMMANDOS SINCE THEY ACQUIRED MORE AND MORE LETHAL WEAPONS AFTER ARRIVAL AND THE UGANDAN TROOPS WERE

CONFIDENTIAL

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CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 PARIS 19568 03 OF 04 032055Z

73

ACTION SCCT-01

INFO OCT-01 AF-08 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 CCO-00 CIAE-00

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 03 OF 04 PARIS 19568

CLEARLY THERE AS A BACK-UP FORCE NOT JUST QTE IMPRISONING END QTE COMMANDOS BUT ALSO HELPING IMPRISON PASSENGERS. GIVEN THE PHYSICAL SET-UP, THE GREAT NUMBER OF UGANDANS, AND THEIR CLOSE PROXIMITY TO THE PLO, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN QUITE EASY, MOST THOUGHT, FOR THE UGANDANS TO HAVE DISARMED OR KILLED THE COMMANDOS HAD THEY WISHED. IN FACT, THE PASSENGERS BEGAN TO FEAR THE UGANDANS EVEN MORE THAN THE FOUR ARABS WHO HAD TAKEN OVER ON ARRIVAL, JUST AS THEY INITIALLY HAD FEARED THE FOUR ARABS MORE THAN THE ORIGINAL HIJACKERS.

6. AMIN HIMSELF MADE NO BONES ABOUT HIS SYMPATHY FOR THE CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 PARIS 19568 03 OF 04 032055Z

THE AIMS OF THE COMMANDOS. HE SAID THAT HE WAS HAPPY TO HELP THE COMMANDOS SINCE HE SHARED THEIR OPINIONS. HE TOLD THE PASSENGERS THAT IF THEIR GOVERNMENTS WISHED TO SEE THEM ALIVE, THEY MUST COOPERATE IN MEETING THE JUST DEMANDS OF THE HIJACKERS.

7. SOME OF THE AMERICANS THOUGHT THAT AMIN HOPED TO GET CREDIT FOR THE HUMANE TREATMENT OF THE PASSENGERS AND THEIR RELEASE AND TO GET THE GRATITUDE OF THE EXTREMIST ARABS BECAUSE OF HIS MAKING POSSIBLE THE DETENTION OF THE PASSENGERS WITH NO RISK TO THE HIJACKERS AND FACILITATING THE RELEASE OF TERRORISTS. SOME CYNICALLY NOTED THAT UGANDA WAS MAKING A GREAT

DEAL OF MONEY OUT OF THE HIJACKING, BOTH FROM AIR FRANCE PAYMENTS AND THE INDIVIDUAL EXPENDITURES BY THE PASSENGERS -- \$1 FOR TOILET PAPER, FOR EXAMPLE.

8. POSSIBLE ROLE OF SOME PASSENGERS. SEVERAL AMERICANS WERE SUSPICIOUS OF ONE OF THE JORDANIAN (SALMY) AND EGYPTIAN PASSENGERS, BUT NOT OF THE MORROCAN. SOME THOUGH THAT SALMY AND THEEGYPTIAN BOTH WERE WORKING WITH THE HIJACKERS AT LEAST AFTER THE EVENT, AND THAT SALMY IN PARTICULAR SEEMED TO BE THE HIJACKERS SPY AMONG THE PASSENGERS. SOME EVEN THOUGHT THAT THE JORDANIAN MIGHT HAVE HELPED THE HIJACKERS GET THEIR ARMS AND EXPLOSIVES ON BOARD. ONE AMERICAN BELIEVED THAT ONE OF THE CANADIAN PASSENGERS, MIRIAM FIELD, HAD HELPED BRING ARMS ABOARD IN HER HEAVY HANDBAG AND HAD PASSED THEM TO THE GERMAN WOMAN WHEN SHE WENT TO THE LADIES' ROOM ON THE WEAK EXCUSE OF WISHING TO FRESHEN HER MAKEUP IMMEDIATELY AFTER TAKE OFF RATHER THAN IMMEDIATELY BEFORE LANDING IN ORDER TO BE AT HER BEST FOR PARIS. CANADIAN EMBASSY OFFICIALS FOUND THAT FIELD LEFT THE AIRPORT QUICKLY (WITH AN AMERICAN) WITHOUT CHECKING IN WITH THEM AND SHE HAS NOT BEEN STAYING AT THE HOTEL WHERE RESERVATIONS HAD BEEN MADE. SINCE SHE WOULD BE WITHOUT DOCUMENTATION IF SHE HAD BEEN TREATED LIKE THE OTHER PASSENGERS, CANADIANS ARE SURPRISED THAT SHE HAS NOT BEEN IN CONTACT WITH THEM. WE REPORT THE ABOVE AS MERELY THE IMPRESSIONS OF SOME OF THE PASSENGERS, SPECULATION INDUCED BY THEIR
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 PARIS 19568 03 OF 04 032055Z

SURPRISE THAT EVEN THE LAX SECURITY AT THE ATHENS AIRPORT HAD PERMITTED THE INTRODUCTION OF SUBSTANTIAL ARMS.

9. INTENTIONS OF THE HIJACKERS. THE AMERICANS GENERALLY THOUGHT THE HIJACKERS CONSIDERED THE MOST IMPORTANT PUBLICITY WAS AT LEAST CONSIDERABLE IF NOT TOTAL SUCCESS IN OBTAINING THE RELEASE OF PRISONERS IN ISRAEL, FRANCE AND GERMANY, AT LEAST. THEY THOUGHT THAT COMMANDOS DID NOT INTEND A GENERAL KILLING OF THE ISRAELIS OR OF THE FRENCH YOUNG PASSENGERS AND CREW, BUT THAT THEY MIGHT START BY SHOOTING ONE OR TWO ISRAELIS FIRST TO EMPHASIZE THE SERIOUSNESS OF THEIR DEMANDS. THE ARABS SEEMED NOW RATHER SURE OF THEMSELVES SINCE THEY NOW APPEARED CONVINCED OF COMPLETE BACKING FROM AMIN. (THE GERMANS, HOWEVER, HAD APPARENTLY COMPLETELY DISLIKED AND DISTRUSTED AMIN PERHAPS BECAUSE HE IS NOT AN INTELLECTUAL RATHER THAN OUT OF REAL FEAR HE MIGHT TURN ON THEM.) HE AMERICANS THOUGHT THAT THE COMMANDOS' OPTIMISM WAS JUSTIFIED

SINCE THEY HELD ALL THE CARDS AND EVENTUALLY EVEN ISRAEL WOULD BE FORCED TO YIELD, IN PART BECAUSE OF DEMANDS FROM MANY RELATIVES OF THE ISRAELI CAPTIVES.

10. THE AMERICANS AT FIRST WERE SURPRISED AT THE ANIMOSITY SHOWN TOWARD THE FRENCH GIVEN THE RATHER PRO-ARAB GOF POLICY, BUT THE GERMANS TOLD THEM THAT NOT ONLY HAD FRANCE HELPED ISRAEL MATERIALLY (NUCLEAR

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 PARIS 19568 04 OF 04 032055Z

73

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 04 OF 04 PARIS 19568

ENERGY PLANT, MIRAGES, ETC.) BUT ALSO THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT HAD PERMITTED ISRAELI AGENTS TO KILL 50 OF THE PALESTINIAN AGENTS IN FRANCE WITHOUT ANY EFFORT BY

THE GOF TO FIND AND PROSECUTE THE ASSASSINS. HENCE THE DECISION TO ATTACK A FRENCH PLANE, TO HOLD PRISONER THE FRENCH CREW AND SOME YOUNG FRENCH PASSENGERS, AND TO MAKE HEAVY DEMANDS ON THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT CONCERNING RELEASE OF PRISONERS.

11. SITUATION OF ISRAELI PRISONERS. THE AMERICANS SAID THAT THE ISRAELIS WERE WELL ORGANIZED, DISCIPLINED, COHESIVE, BUT PASSIVE. ALTHOUGH THE FRENCH APPLAUDED EACH TIME AMIN MADE A THEATRICAL ENTRANCE IN A CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 PARIS 19568 04 OF 04 032055Z

DIFFERENT COSTUME, THE ISREALIS RESPONDED WITH SILENT DEFIANCE. THEY APPARENTLY HAVE NEVER CONSIDERED THE POSSIBILITY OF RESISTANCE, NO DOUBT IN PART BECAUSE SO MANY OF THEM ARE VERY OLD. ONCE THEY WERE IN UGANDA ALL THOUGHT OF RESISTANCE WAS UNREALISTIC SINCE THEY ARE SURROUNDED BY HUNDREDS OF AMIN'S PARATROOPERS. AMIN HAD SAID THAT IF THERE WERE AN ASSAULT FROM OUTSIDE OR AN UPRISING WITHIN THE BUILDING, THE WHOLE BUILDING WOULD BE BLOWN UP. THE AMERICANS BELIEVE THAT THIS IS NOT TRUE, AND THAT BOXES SOME THOUGHT MIGHT BE FILLED WITH DYNAMITE WERE REALLY DESIGNED JUST TO BLOCK OFF A DOOR. IN ANY CASE, THE ISRAELIS KNOW THAT THEIR CHANCES OF RESCUE OR ESCAPE ARE NIL. THE DISTRESS HAS INCREASED AS THEY HAVE SEEN TWO PLANELOADS OF OTHER PASSENGERS LEAVE, BUT THEY HAVE REMAINED STOIC. A FEW MORE DAYS UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES COULD CAUSE SOME OF THE OLD AND INFIRM TO BREAK -- JUST AS TWO OLD FRENCH WOMEN BROKE THE NIGHT OF THEIR ARRIVAL IN UGANDA.

12. THE GERMANS HERE HAVE ALREADY EXPRESSED AN INTEREST IN OUR REPORTS OF THE OBSERVATIONS AND OPINIONS OF THE AMERICAN PASSENGERS. WE SUGGEST THE DEPARTMENT DECIDE WHETHER THE ABOVE SHOULD BE FURNISHED WHOLE OR IN PART TO CERTAIN FRIENDLY GOVERNMENTS.
RUSH

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