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(The Tower Board): Records, 1987

Folder Title: SRB1121 TWA 847 Hijacking

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WITHDRAWAL SHEET

Ronald Reagan Library

Collection: PRESIDENT'S SPECIAL REVIEW BOARD
 (TOWER BOARD): Records
File Folder: SRB 1121 TWA 847 Hijacking Box 93195

Archivist: mjd
FOIA ID: F97-059/2
Date: 09/21/1999

DOCUMENT NO. & TYPE	SUBJECT/TITLE	DATE	RESTRICTION
1. draft paper	re: the Hijacking of TWA 847, 11p <i>P 3/15/06 F97-059/2 #1</i>	nd	P1/F1
2. draft paper	text same as item 1, 11p <i>P " " #2</i>	nd	P1/F1

RESTRICTIONS

P-1 National security classified information [(a)(1) of the PRA].
 P-2 Relating to appointment to Federal office [(a)(2) of the PRA].

P-3 Release would violate a Federal statute [(a)(3) of the PRA].
 P-4 Release would disclose trade secrets or confidential commercial or financial information [(a)(4) of the PRA].
 P-5 Release would disclose confidential advice between the President and his advisors, or between such advisors [(a)(5) of the PRA].
 P-6 Release would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy [(a)(6) of the PRA].

C. Closed in accordance with restrictions contained in donor's deed of gift.

F-1 National security classified information [(b)(1) of the FOIA].
 F-2 Release could disclose internal personnel rules and practices of an agency [(b)(2) of the FOIA].
 F-3 Release would violate a Federal statute [(b)(3) of the FOIA].
 F-4 Release would disclose trade secrets or confidential commercial or financial information [(b)(4) of the FOIA].
 F-6 Release would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy [(b)(6) of the FOIA].
 F-7 Release would disclose information compiled for law enforcement purposes [(b)(7) of the FOIA].
 F-8 Release would disclose information concerning the regulation of financial institutions [(b)(8) of the FOIA].
 F-9 Release would disclose geological or geophysical information concerning wells [(b)(9) of the FOIA].

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1 to MUSKIE
1 to SLOWCROFT
1 to McFADDEN
1 to BRATHWAITE

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The Hijacking of TWA 847Background

On June 14, 1985, TWA 847, en route from Athens to Rome was hijacked by two Lebanese, who demand the release of all Lebanese detainees in Israel and Kuwait, and the release of four specific individuals: a third hijacker, who had been arrested in Athens, two Lebanese, allegedly in Israeli prisons, and one Lebanese allegedly held in Cyprus (but who had actually been released into Amal custody on May 30). TWA 847 had on board 135 Americans and 16 aliens. Between June 14 and June 16, the aircraft shuttles between Beirut and Algeria. It remains at Beirut Airport from June 16 to June 29 when the hostages are released. (This section will be expanded to short case study of incident)

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A preliminary characterization of the process of developing and implementing a USG response to the hijacking offers the following elements:

- The response to the hijacking was directed and coordinated by the National Security Advisor and National Security Council staff.
- Policy and operational response options were tasked to and developed by the appropriate departments and agencies, and vetted through those interagency groups constituted for the review and implementation of counter-terrorism responses.
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By AM, NARA, Date 3/15/06

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- There was concomitant development, consideration and decision to implement a range of longer-term counter-terrorism strategies, designed to safeguard against future hijacking incidents.

- There was ex post facto review of USG handling of the incident and the initiation of a long-term planning strategy both improve counter-terrorism operations and eventually to reduce the occurrence of terrorist incidents.

- Actions and options considered consistent with stated US policy.* (Possible Israeli deal, US statement)

TWA 847 Chronology

June 14 - June 30, 1985

June 14

TWA Flight 847 departs Athens en route to Rome with 153 people on board, including 129 American passengers, 14 alien passengers, six American crewmembers, two alien crewmembers, and two Lebanese hijackers.

Circa 0310, TWA 847 is diverted to Beirut, where it lands at 0453 over the protests of Lebanese air controllers. Nineteen passengers, 17 women and two children are released, and the aircraft was refueled.

President's national security staff begin a series of secure conference calls which continue throughout crisis. (WHCMC chron.)

Terrorist Incidents Working Group (TIWG) is scheduled for 1000.

At 0630, TWA 847 leaves for Algiers. Prior to taking off, the hijackers list initial demands: release of all Lebanese detainees in Israel and Kuwait, and release of four specific individuals. In addition, the hijackers condemn the bombings at Bir al Abd and Riyadh, attack the Arab League and the Palestinians, condemn American practices in the Arab world, as well as US financial support to Israel.

State Department forms Task Force at 0700.

TIWG meets at 1000. Recommends:

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FOIA(b) (1)

[REDACTED] diplomatic initiatives to Syria and Berri. (WHCMC Chron)

At TIWG meeting, State is designated as lead agency and organizes a task force.

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North Action Memo to McFarlane indicates President approved [REDACTED] and notes that State has

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instructed USAMBs to approach Assad and other Arab leaders to assist in release. North indicates that TIWG principals agreed not to give Congressional briefings unless the [redacted] (North Memo to McFarlane, "Hijacking of TWA 847, June 14, 1985")

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Plane arrives in Algiers at 1030 and spends several hours there, during which 21 additional passengers are released and the plane is again refueled although Algerians initially refuse. Hijackers threaten to execute hostages if aircraft not permitted to depart.

Hijackers add demand for US \$15 million and ask to talk to US Ambassador.

US urges GOL not to allow aircraft to return to Beirut, and urges governments of Syria and Cyprus to accept the aircraft if diverted from Beirut. Amal contact promises AMEMB Beirut heavy presence at Beirut airport and continued close contact on incident.

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USS SAIPAN and NIMITZ diverted to support contingency ops.

Hijackers reportedly plant explosives on aircraft.

SECDEF authorizes [redacted] FOIA(b) (1)

USAMB Beirut tells GOL to refuse landing rights.

At 1525, aircraft leaves again for Beirut, landing at 1920 although runways blocked by trucks. Pilot says situation desperate, requests permission to land. Robert Strethem is killed and his body thrown onto the tarmac.

Hijackers demand that the ranking Amal official come to the airport. The request is eventually granted.

About a dozen heavily armed men, probably Hizballah and Amal militia, board the plane and take control from the original hijackers.

Hijackers demand release of all Arab prisoners in Lebanon, complete withdrawal of Israel from Lebanon, withdrawal of Lahad's forces from Lebanon. They reiterate demand for release of Ali Atwah (third hijacker, in Greek custody) and threaten to kill eight Greek passengers, if he is not released.

American Jews and US military are singled out, and 12 passengers are taken off the plane, including all six US military.

President asks Algiers to allow aircraft to land but not to take off again.

President urges Assad to contact Iranian/Shia leaders to influence hijackers to release hostages to Algerian authorities.

June 15

Plane arrives in Algiers at 0250. International Red Cross (ICRC) sends team to Algiers at request of US and Algerian governments.

ICRC and Algerian officials are permitted to board plane to check health of hostages and hear the demands of the hijackers.

Hijackers reiterate previous demands and threaten to kill all passengers if Ali Atwah not released.

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Israelis announce intention to gradually release prisoners -- depending on security situation. Sooner or later, all are to be released.

President requests Algerian President Bendjedid to keep aircraft in Algiers.

Greek government considers release of third hijacker.

Shultz sends President detailed status report of current situation diplomatically, and with respect to 

 McFarlane writes in the margins to the President that "Mr. President, Our specific goals are: Keep them talking, keep the plane on the ground, 

 (Shultz Memo to Pres. "Status Report on the TWA Hijacking.")

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After 25 hours in Algiers, aircraft departs again for Beirut, landing at 0745. [REDACTED] pilot or hijacker to Beirut Tower stated "We want aircraft demobilized in Beirut so it cannot be flown anymore."

Pilot radios that hijackers ultimately want to go to Teheran, where they will release passengers and crew. If request denied, plane will be disabled in Beirut.

USEMBDamascus informed that Assad told of US request to put heavy pressure on Berri to assist US.

Hijackers state they will negotiate with Red Cross. Secure telephone consultations held among McFarlane, Shultz, Weinberger.

Remaining 29 passengers are removed from plane; three flight crewmen remain on board with unknown number of hijackers.

Amal leader Nabih Barri enters negotiations. He says he is assured by hijackers that no harm will come to hostages if things are proceeding. He releases one hostage (Peel).

Bartholomew tells Algerian charge (Washington) to contact Shiite leader Fadlallah to try to end hijacking. Charge uninformed/not useful.

Barri pledges to release hostages if US persuades Israel to release Atlit prisoners. (FBIS)

President meets in SitRoom at 1300 with full NSC plus deputies for NSPG (includes participation of FAA administrator Donald Engen): [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Shultz notes that Barri probably acted in concert with the Syrians; expectation that US will pressure Israelis to release Lebanese prisoners. Notes Algerians helpful but [REDACTED] and twice refused to keep aircraft. Weinberger agrees extremely dangerous to act. Reaffirms basic policy not to negotiate. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Hold Amal responsible. [REDACTED]

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McFarlane calls Berri (30 minute conversation): US will not make concessions or ask anyone else to do so...will hold Shia community responsible if passengers harmed...future of Shia will be determined by responsible behavior...Al Dawa prisoner

release creates contest of wills which US/Israel will not concede.

ICRC meets with Israeli officials...ready to facilitate release of ex-Ansar prisoners...will not be party to negotiations.

Shultz makes statement "we call upon those holding the hostages to treat them properly and release them immediately. We will not make deals with terrorists and will not encourage others to do so."

Bartholomew in contact with Barri. Barth. reports Barri "very tough"... "it is now up to US."

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US demarche to Berri: the US understands aircraft is refueled and loaded with explosives, and expects Berri to control the aircraft.

Presidential message to Assad: increase pressure on Berri to be tough with hijackers...use own channels with PSP, Hizballah, Iranians...release prisoners quickly and transfer out of Lebanon.

Speakes publically says that Israelis should release the Lebanese prisoners since they are illegally detained.

UAE paper reports Algerian plan that hostages be released if US promises that Israel will release Shia prisoners at a later date.

June 19

SECSTATE message to Gemayel looking to him for help.

US requests ICRC to see hostages.

June 20

NSPG meeting at 1000.

Austria offers to assist.

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June 21

US proposes release scenarios to Berri: release to Syria, Algiers, UN, ICRC...avoid release in Beirut.

Japan approaches Iran and Syria...Iran denies responsibility, blames Syria.

US message to world requesting improvements in airport security.

President meets with hostage families in Dallas.

June 22

US message to Iran: Iran cannot escape responsibility for failure to act urgently to help.

US message to Syria: keep pressure on Berri...urge Iranians to use their influence.

In contact with Algerians.

June 23

In contact with Algerians.

Rabin announces that 31 of the Shia prisoners will be released the next morning a result of prior legal appeals,

not in response to hijacking.

June 24

FOIA(b)(1)

CPPG meets: reviews [REDACTED] and to consider other methods of increasing pressure.

Israel releases 31 detainees from Atlit prison and, in Beirut, Nabih Berri announces a new demand: US Navy ships in area must leave before hostages can be released.

NSPG meets at 1400: President decides to let diplomatic action play out for next several days. Recognizes that real player is Assad and that plan has to be developed accordingly. (WHCMC Chron.)

In contact with Algerians.

June 25

Gemayel message to Shultz: doing what I can; area not under GOL control.

Larry Speakes discusses with the Press options the President might consider, including limiting goods and services to Beirut and limiting use of Beirut International Airport (BIA).

NSPG meets at 1330: reviews the Plan of Action to place increasing pressure on Syria to extricate the hostages and to press forward with a campaign against terrorism. (WHCMC Chron.)

CPPG meets at 1600: refines details of Plan.

In contact with Syrians.

June 26

NSPG meets at 1000: defers initial steps of plan pending diplomatic developments.

CPPG meets at 1050, chaired by Poindexter.

CPPG follow-on meeting at 1340, chaired by Fortier.

News blackout is declared.

Hostage Palmer is released because of heart condition.

Berri reiterates demand that US warships leave Lebanese coasts and adds demand that neither the US nor Israel retaliate once crisis is resolved.

Berri announces proposal to transfer all hostages to a Western Embassy in Beirut or Damascus, where they would remain until the release of the Atlit prisoners.

In contact with Syrians, Paris.

June 27

Israeli Amb. to Armacost: there is debate as to status of prisoners under Geneva convention...asks US not to bring up issue again.

CPPG meets at 1000: develops a contingency plan in the event of only partial release of the prisoners.

Europeans will not accept conditions of Berri's release scenario.

In contact with Syrians, Algerians, Tel Aviv.

June 28

CPPG meets at 1030: recommends implementation of Phase 1 actions to pressure Assad, if no release by the afternoon.

NSPG meets at 1700: reviews diplomatic situation. Confirms plans for extraction of hostages once they are in Syria. Campaign against terrorism to continue.

In contact with Syrians, Algerians, Geneva, Paris, Tel Aviv.

June 29

US C-141 with reception team departs Washington for Frankfurt. Another C-141 goes to Damascus.

Hostages released, according to Press, and en route to Syria, although there are conflicting reports as to their status and location.

PM Peres, on Jerusalem radio, declares the freeing of the hostages "removes a major obstacle to freeing Lebanese Shiite prisoners"...denies Israel took any part in deal.

Later reporting, confirmed about 0700, shows hostages still in Beirut and in custody of Amal/Hizballah... Berri apparently seeking more definite guarantee re Atlit detainees and assurance that US will not retaliate.

State issues the following statement at 2230: "The US reaffirms its longstanding support for the preservation of

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Lebanon, its government, its stability and security, and for the mitigation of the suffering of its people." If asked, the spokesman was authorized to say that we are making this statement in order to make our position clear.

June 30

At 0330, Syrian officials in Damascus tell the US Embassy "Syria has solved" the problem that delayed the release of the 39 TWA hijacking hostages.

At 1405, Speakes announces release of the hostages and crossing of the Syria-Lebanon border at 1330.

At 1805 President announces departure from Syria.

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Background

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By AMJ, NARA, Date 3/15/06

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Larry Speakes discusses with the Press options the President might consider, including limiting goods and services to Beirut and limiting use of Beirut International Airport (BIA).

NSPG meets at 1330: reviews the Plan of Action to place increasing pressure on Syria to extricate the hostages and to press forward with a campaign against terrorism. (WHCMC Chron.)

CPPG meets at 1600: refines details of Plan.

In contact with Syrians.

June 26

NSPG meets at 1000: defers initial steps of plan pending diplomatic developments.

CPPG meets at 1050, chaired by Poindexter.

CPPG follow-on meeting at 1340, chaired by Fortier.

News blackout is declared.

Hostage Palmer is released because of heart condition.

Berri reiterates demand that US warships leave Lebanese coasts and adds demand that neither the US nor Israel retaliate once crisis is resolved.

DRAFT

Berri announces proposal to transfer all hostages to a Western Embassy in Beirut or Damascus, where they would remain until the release of the Atlit prisoners.

In contact with Syrians, Paris.

June 27

Israeli Amb. to Armacost: there is debate as to status of prisoners under Geneva convention...asks US not to bring up issue again.

CPPG meets at 1000: develops a contingency plan in the event of only partial release of the prisoners.

Europeans will not accept conditions of Berri's release scenario.

In contact with Syrians, Algerians, Tel Aviv.

June 28

CPPG meets at 1030: recommends implementation of Phase 1 actions to pressure Assad, if no release by the afternoon.

NSPG meets at 1700: reviews diplomatic situation. Confirms plans for extraction of hostages once they are in Syria. Campaign against terrorism to continue.

In contact with Syrians, Algerians, Geneva, Paris, Tel Aviv.

June 29

US C-141 with reception team departs Washington for Frankfurt. Another C-141 goes to Damascus.

Hostages released, according to Press, and en route to Syria, although there are conflicting reports as to their status and location.

PM Peres, on Jerusalem radio, declares the freeing of the hostages "removes a major obstacle to freeing Lebanese Shiite prisoners"...denies Israel took any part in deal.

Later reporting, confirmed about 0700, shows hostages still in Beirut and in custody of Amal/Hizballah... Berri apparently seeking more definite guarantee re Atlit detainees and assurance that US will not retaliate.

State issues the following statement at 2230: "The US reaffirms its longstanding support for the preservation of

Lebanon, its government, its stability and security, and for the mitigation of the suffering of its people." If asked, the spokesman was authorized to say that we are making this statement in order to make our position clear.

June 30

At 0330, Syrian officials in Damascus tell the US Embassy "Syria has solved" the problem that delayed the release of the 39 TWA hijacking hostages.

At 1405, Speakes announces release of the hostages and crossing of the Syria-Lebanon border at 1330.

At 1805 President announces departure from Syria.