Hijacked Israeli Airliner flown to Algiers by Palestinian Arab Commandos. - Detention of Israeli Crew and Male Israeli Passengers. - Negotiations between Algerian Government and International Air Line Pilots’ Federation.

An Israeli airliner—a Boeing 707 of El Al (the Israel airline)—was hijacked over the Mediterranean on July 23 by armed Palestinian Arabs while on a scheduled flight from Home to Tel-Aviv, and forced to land at Algiers. The 23 non-Israeli passengers were immediately released and flown the same day to Paris in an Air Algerie plane, at the Algerian Government's expense, but the 22 Israelis on board (12 passengers and 10 members of the crew, including three air stewardesses) were detained by the Algerian Government, as well as the airliner itself.

According to statements by the released passengers on their arrival in Paris, the airliner had been commandeered in flight by several armed men (some of the passengers said three and others five) who threatened the crew and passengers with pistols and grenades. The men had proclaimed themselves Palestinian Arabs, announced that the plane had been renamed “Liberation of Palestine,” and forced the passengers to sit with their hands above their heads; one of the hijackers, obviously a skilled pilot, had taken over the navigation of the plane and made a good landing at Dar-el-Beida airport, Algiers. An Italian priest who was among the passengers said that the captain of the airliner—other reports, however, said the navigator—had emerged from the cockpit with blood streaming down his face, having apparently been hit with the butt of a gun. At the airport the Israeli passengers were told by the Algerian authorities that they had nothing against them personally but that Algeria was opposed to the “Zionist State.”

A statement was issued in Beirut the same day (July 23) by an Arab guerrilla organization, the “Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine,” claiming responsibility for hijacking the airliner and forcing it to land at Algiers. It was stated that the Algerian Government had no advance knowledge of the hijacking, but that it was being asked to impound the plane and to hold the Israeli crew and passengers as hostages for Palestinian Arab commandos held in Israel. On July 29 it was further stated in Beirut that a six-man delegation representing three Palestinian Arab organizations—the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and Al Fatah (the guerrilla organization)—had gone to Algiers to persuade the Algerian authorities to hold on to the airliner and to release the Israeli passengers and crew only in return for more than 1,000 Arab guerillas held in Israel. It was stated that the delegation was prepared to discuss arrangements for such an exchange with the International Red Cross.

Meanwhile, 10 of the detained Israelis—four women passengers, three children, and the three air stewardesses—had been released by the Algerian authorities on July 27 and flown in a Swiss airliner to Geneva, whence they were re-flown to Israel; 12 male Israelis—five passengers and seven aircrew—remained detained in Algiers. The freed women passengers and stewardesses said
they had been well treated by the Algerian authorities, who had detained them at a military-type camp near Algiers airport.

In Jerusalem, the Israeli Minister of Communications, Mr Moshe Carmel, told the Knesset on July 23 that the Government of Israel viewed the hijacking of the airliner—which he described as “airborne piracy”—with the utmost gravity; he expressed the Israeli Government's hope that the Algerian Government would “do its duty under international law and morality by releasing without delay the aircraft, its passengers, and its crew.” It was also stated in Jerusalem that the Israeli Government had appealed to the U.N. Secretary-General, UN in 1957. In 1961 he was elected acting secretary-general on the death of Dag Hammarskjöld, and the appointment was confirmed in 1962. He played a major diplomatic in the Cuba missile crisis of 1962 and in efforts to contain and resolve the Congo civil war, and was responsible for setting up a UN peacekeeping force for Cyprus in 1964. He resigned in 1971. U Thant, and to the International Civil Aviation Organization to use their good offices to effect the return of the plane and the detained Israeli nationals.

Both at the United Nations and in various capitals there was intense diplomatic activity during the next few weeks—on which, however, complete silence was maintained—aimed at effecting the release of the impounded airliner and the remaining Israeli passengers and crew. On July 25 it was reported in the Press that Israel had requested several Governments, including those of France, Britain, and Italy, to use their good offices to this effect, and at the U.N. Dr. Ralph Bunche, UN in 1957. In 1961 he was elected acting secretary-general on the death of Dag Hammarskjöld, and the appointment was confirmed in 1962. He played a major diplomatic in the Cuba missile crisis of 1962 and in efforts to contain and resolve the Congo civil war, and was responsible for setting up a UN peacekeeping force for Cyprus in 1964. He resigned in 1971. U Thant's chief aide, had several separate meetings with the Algerian and Israeli representatives. The Algerian Foreign Minister, M Bouteflika, who was in Paris at the time, emphasized in a press statement on July 25 that his Government was “neither directly nor indirectly involved” in the hijacking of the airliner and its forced landing at Algiers. M Bouteflika added that Algeria was “a sovereign State that respects international morality,” that she was a signatory to “a number of international conventions which we respect,” but that he could not at the present time “anticipate the results of an inquiry which has not yet ended.”

During the last week of July two senior representatives of the International Federation of Air Line Pilots Association (IFALPA)—Captain Ole Forsberg, of Finnair (the Finnish airline), and Captain James O’Grady, of Aer Lingus (the Irish airline)—visited Algiers in an effort to secure the release of the hijacked airliner and its crew and passengers. Though having talks with the Algerian Director of Civil Aviation, they were apparently unsuccessful in their aim of seeing the Algerian Ministers of Justice and Foreign Affairs. Captain Jan Bartelski, president of IFALPA, stated in London on July 31 that Captains Forsberg and O’Grady had lunched with the detained Israeli crew and had reported that they were being treated satisfactorily.

As a result of the failure of continued negotiations between IFALPA and the Algerian authorities, plans for an air boycott of Algeria were announced by IFALPA in London on Aug. 13. The proposed action was agreed upon after Captain Bartelski had sent a letter to Colonel Boumedienne, the Algerian Head of State, outlining the Federation's unsuccessful attempts—
made during two visits to Algiers—to secure the release of the Israeli aircrew and the remaining passengers.

The executive secretary of IFALPA, Captain Charles Jackson, explained that it was planned to stop commercial flights between Western Europe and Algeria as long as the hijacked Israeli aircrew and passengers were not released by the Algerian authorities. Accordingly, the Federation had requested Air France, Swissair, and Alitalia—the three West European airlines operating flights to Algeria—to cease all flights to that country as soon as possible. Captain Jackson noted that these three airlines handled half of all air traffic into and out of Algeria, with Air France doing most of the business. It was stated that the many French pilots working for Air Algerie (the Algerian airline) would not be asked to take any action, so as not to create difficulties for them.

Promises of support for the proposed air boycott of Algeria came from the International Air Transport Federation, which said that it would ask its members not to service any Algerian aircraft coming out of Algeria—a move which, if put into effect, would bring all overseas flights by Air Algerie to a standstill.

[IFALPA represents some 35,000 pilots in about 50 countries—not, however, Arab or Communist countries. Air France has about 30 flights a week to Algiers, Swissair two flights a week, and Alitalia one flight a week. No British airline runs passenger flights to Algeria, and no American airline has operated to Algeria since the latter country broke off relations with the United States at the time of the 1967 war in the Middle East. There are a few flights from East European Communist countries to Al]

The proposed air boycott of Algeria was called off by IFALPA on Aug. 17, however, two days before it was scheduled to begin. On the previous day, Aug. 16, Captain Bartelski and M. Vitaly Nicolaieff (a French pilot and a vice-president of IFALPA) had gone to Algiers, at the request of the Algerian Government, to see the detained Israeli aircrew and passengers and assure themselves that they were being well cared for. On returning from Algiers Captain Bartelski explained that the Algerian authorities had specially asked him not to disclose the place where the 12 men were being held.

In a statement in Algiers on Aug. 15, M Bouteflika said that Algeria wished to find “a satisfactory solution to this delicate problem, whose aspects, both political and judicial, are multifarious and complex.” Already, he pointed out, all non-Israeli passengers had been set free, as well as the Israeli women and children on board. After stressing that Algeria had had nothing whatever to do with the hijacking of the airliner, and that she had “not hesitated to adopt an attitude conforming to international conventions and regulations,” M Bouteflika added that “bellicose declarations and menaces of reprisals are singularly at variance with the restrained attitude adopted by the Algerian authorities, and are certainly not calculated to facilitate the attainment of a solution.…”

The director-general of the International Air Transport Association, Mr Knut Hammarskjold, had on,July 31 urged all 103 airline members of the IATA to press their Governments to ratify without delay the Tokio Convention providing for the outlawing of hijacking, the return of
hijacked crews, passengers, and aircraft, and the punishment of air pirates. Although signed in 1963, as stated in, this Convention has been ratified to date by only six countries—Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Portugal, the Philippines, and Nationalist China (Formosa). Twelve ratifications are needed before the Convention can take effect.---(Times - Daily Telegraph - Guardian - Le Monde - New York Times)