

Hijacking of Air France Airbus by Followers of Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - Israeli Action to liberate Hostages held at Entebbe Airport - Inconclusive Debate at UN security Council - Ugandan Recriminations against Britain and Kenya - Severance of Diplomatic Relations with Uganda by Britain

An Air France A300-B airbus, under way from Tel Aviv to Paris and carrying a crew of 12 and 247 passengers, was hijacked shortly after it had taken off from Athens at 11.55 a.m. on June 27, 1976, by an armed group of three men and a woman calling itself the Che Guevara cell of the Haifa section of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).

A spokesman for the PFLP in Damascus telephoned the Reuter office in Kuwait on the same day to announce his organization's responsibility for the hijacking, but a Beirut spokesman for the PFLP denied on June 28 that it had anything to do with the action. The PFLP led by Dr George Habash, is part of the "rejection front" whwch opposes any "partal" settlement which would guarantee the existence of a Jewish state on the territory of Plestine—see 26961.]

The leader of the hijackers was Herr Wilfried Bose (27), a West German lawyer who had been part of the PFLP network, for whose terrorist activities in Europe Sr Ilich Ramirez Sánchez (alias Carlos Martínez or "The Jackal") had been responsible [see 27587]. The woman terrorist was later identified as Frau Gabriele Krocher-Tiedemann, who was one of the five West German prisoners released in March 1975 in exchange for the kidnapped Herr Peter Lorenz in Berlin [see 27158], and who had also been involved in the raid on the OPEC headquarters in Vienna in December 1975 [see 27587 A]. The two other hijackers were believed to be Palestinian Arabs.

All four were thought to have boarded the airbus in Athens, where there had been no strict control of passengers in transit from other aircraft, partly because of a strike of airport employees. The Greek authorities, however, maintained on July 4 that the hijackers could only have boarded the aircraft in Tel Aviv.

Herr Bose forced the aircraft's pilot, Captain Michel Bacos, to fly to Benghazi (Libya), where it spent nine hours, during which it was allowed to refuel, while one of the passengers, a pregnant Englishwoman, was permitted to leave it.

Five hours after take-off from Benghazi the airbus reached Entebbe (Uganda), where the passengers were held in the aircraft for another six hours before being taken to a dilapidated building which was the airport's former terminal building.

After the hijackers had been joined by six further men, some of them armed and believed to be Palestinians, Herr Bose announced that the crew and passengers were still under his control, though they were in fact guarded by some 80 Ugandan soldiers armed with rifles. The passengers were supplied with food and drink by the manager of the airport's duty-free shop, who stated that he was ready to do so because he had expected them.

President Amin of Uganda paid a first visit to the building an hour later, stating that he knew that the passengers were innocent but emphasizing that the cause of the Palestinians was a just one and that he hoped for the early release of the passengers seized as hostages provided the hijackers' demands were met by Israel.

The details of these demands, which had been passed on to Mr Mordechai Gazit, the Israeli ambassador in Paris, on June 29, were for the release by noon GMT on July 1 of 58 "freedom fighters" alleged to be imprisoned in Israel, West Germany, Kenya, Switzerland and France-failing which the hostages would suffer "strict and severe punishment".

Those whose release was demanded included 40 prisoners said to be held by Israel, among them Archbishop Hilarion Capuecci, serving a prison sentence imposed in December 1974 for arms smuggling [see page 26879], Mr Kozo Okamoto, the Japanese sentenced to life imprisonment after the 1972 Lod airport massacre [see 25440 A], and Mrs Fatima Barnawi, serving a life sentence for placing a bomb in 1967 [see 25715 A]: (ii) six from West Germany—Herr Jan-Carl Raspe, one of the accused in the Baader-Meinhof trial [see page 27264], Frau Inge Vielt, Herr Raif Reinders and Herr Fritz Teufel, all being held in custody in connexion with the assassination in November 1974 of Judge Günter von Drenkmann [see 27010 A] and the abduction of Herr Lorenz, as well as Frau Ingrid Schubert and Herr Werner Hoppe, both serving prison sentences for attempted murder [see page 27261]; (iii) one from Switzerland—Frau Petra Krause, a German-Italian awaiting trial for explosives offences: (iv) one from France—Sra Amparo Silvia Masmela, a Colombian said to be a friend of " (Carlos Martínez "but who, according the French authorities, had been released from prison in December 1975, and (v) five from Kenya, who had been seized by the Kenyan General Service Unit in January 1976 after Israel had warned Kenya that the PFLP was about to attack El Al airliners at Nairobi airport. (The PFLP admitted on July 6 that it had planned all attack on an El Al airliner in January 1976 and claimed that " One of our commando units" had been detained in Kenya since Jan. 28.) The Kenyan authorities subsequently denied that they held any Palestinian prisoners.

During a second visit to the old air terminal building President Amin announced the release of 47 of the hostages—women, children, old men and some others needing medical attention—and after being handed over to M. Marc Bonnefous, special envoy of the French Government sent to Entebbe, 46 of them reached Paris on June 80. The 47th, an 80-year-old Frenchman, was taken to hospital in Kampala.

The remaining hostages were thereupon separated into Israelis and persons with dual (Israeli and other) nationality on the one hand, and non-Israelis on the other. The hijackers repeated on June 80 that the 53 prisoners listed by them would have to be delivered at Entebbe airport by noon GMT on July 1, failing which, they added, the airbus would be blown up and the remaining passengers and 12 crew members executed.

However, on July 1 the hijackers extended the time limit of their ultimatum until 11 a.m. GMT on July 4. Also on July 1, following negotiations conducted with President Amin by M. Bonnefous and M. Pierre Renard, the French ambassador in Uganda, the hijackers released another 101 hostages—all non-Israelis—who arrived in Paris on July 2. There thus remained in captivity 98 passengers of Israeli or dual nationality and the 12 members of the crew.

The two French diplomats also handed the President a message from President Giscard d'Estaing of France, asking him to "spare no efforts to end a perfectly inhuman act which can only prejudice a cause [i.e. that of the Plestinians] which you support". President Amin was reported to have replied that the matter could be settled if Israel showed understanding, and he asserted that he was not co-operating with the terrorists but merely wished all hostages to be released.

The hijacking was officially condemned in various Arab countries, among them Egypt, Jordan and Syria, and the Arab League denounced it on July 1 because it conflicted with "the general Arab position which is to strengthen co-operation and friendly relations with France". (The Air France airbus was in fact the first French aircraft against which a terrorist attack had been made, although two attacks had been made on a Yugoslav and an El Al aircraft at Orly airport, Paris, in January 1975—see page 27234.)

Mr Ezzedin Kallak, the representative of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in France, also denounced the hijacking as "an attempt calculated to tarnish the image of the Palestinian resistance and to divert the attention of world opinion from the plot which is being hatched in Lebanon against the PLO and the Lebanese national movement".

Dr George Habash, the leader of the PFLP, said in an interview published in Beirut on July 11 that his organization had stopped hijacking operations long ago, and that it had nothing to do with this one which, he said, had been carried out by a group of young men who had broken away some time earlier.

According to claims made in Israel on the same day, the organizer of the hijacking—who had been in Entebbe to await the hijacked airbus—had been Sr Antonio Degas, Bouvier (said to travel on a forged Ecuadorean passport), who was believed to have attempted to murder Mr Joseph Edward Sieff in London in December 1073 [see 26416 A].

During these developments President Amin had been in touch by telephone with Colonel (rtd.) Baruch Bar-Lev in Israel, who had been in charge of the Israeli military mission in Uganda until the latter had broken off diplomatic relations with Israel in 1972 [see 25236 B], and whom the Ugandan President regarded as a personal friend. Colonel Bar-Lev subsequently acted as a go-between for the President and the Government of Israel [see alsobelow].

In Israel the Government had meanwhile held consultations and had appointed a special committee to deal with the question of how to react to the hijackers' demands.

This committee consisted of Mr Itzhak Rabin (the Prime Minister) and five other ministers—Mr Yigal Allon (Foreign Affairs), Mr Shimon Peres (Defence), Mr Haim Zadok (Justice), Mr Gad Yaakobi (Transport) and Mr Israel Galili (Minister without Portfolio).

Following the committee's deliberations the Israeli embassy in Paris stated on July 1 : "The Government of Israel would be ready to start negotiations through the intermediary of the French Government and in common with the latter for the liberation of all passengers in exchange for a certain number of prisoners in Israel."

Mr Yaakobi declared in a television broadcast on the same day that the Government had decided to negotiate on the release of the prisoners because the situation was "exceptionally complex". Israel's object, he said, had always been to save the lives of the hostages, and the latter could not be left in the hands of fanatics in a country with which Israel had no diplomatic relations. Israel, he added, was forced to choose between respect for human lives and the refusal to give in to blackmail. (There had also been considerable pressure on the Government by relatives of the hostages who demanded that the Government should in this case depart from its usual practice of having no dealings with terrorists.)

The Israeli Government's decision—which was thought to have led to the postponement of the ultimatum [see above]—was conveyed to President Amin by M. Renard; to M. Jean Sauvagnargues, the French Foreign Minister, by Mr Gazit, the Israeli ambassador in Paris; and to the hijackers by Mr Hashi Abdullah Farah the Somali ambassador in Uganda, acting as mediator.

Israeli Rescue Action

At the same time as stating that it was ready to begin negotiations, the Israeli Government had also started to plan the rescue of the remaining hostages, and on July 3-4 three Hercules C-130 transport aircraft landed at Entebbe airport; after surprising the Ugandan forces at the—airport, Israeli troops from these aircraft—led by Lieut.-General Dan Shomron and Lieut. -Colonel Yehonathan Nethaniyahu—seized the hostages (including the Air France crew) and flew back with them to Israel after refuelling in Nairobi (Kenya).

This action was preceded by a major intelligence operation involving help by Ugandans opposed to President Amin's regime, who engaged in reconnaissance work concerning the Entebbe airport (which had been expanded since the Israelis left it in 1972), and also the interrogation of released hostages who had arrived in Paris and were able to give details of the location of the remaining hostages and of their Ugandan guards.

General Mordechai Gur, Chief of Staff of the Israeli Armed Forces, selected a team of about 200 commandos and assigned precise duties for an armed action to rescue the hostages to Lieut.-General Shomron and Lieut. -Colonel Nethaniyahu. After reviewing all available information the three officers staged a carefully prepared mock raid in a remote area of Israel, which showed that the operation from landing to take-off with the hostages should take 55 minutes.

General Gur informed the Prime Minister of his plan in the morning of July 3, and Mr Rabin advised the security committee and the full Cabinet in the afternoon on the same day, obtaining their unanimous approval for the proposed operation.

Three C-130s and a Boeing 707 left Israel at 4 p.m. local time on July 3, flying mainly over the Red Sea and later over part of the Sudan where all but one radar station (in the south) had been

closed down owing to the attempted coup against President Nemery on July 2 [see 27883 A]. While the Boeing, equipped as a hospital plane, landed at Nairobi at 11.26 p.m. local time (10.26 Israeli time) the three C-130s flew direct to Entebbe.

After these three aircraft had landed at Entebbe in moonlight shortly before midnight local time, the troops of each plane, who were accompanied by 83 doctors, carried out their specific assignments—occupying the control tower; attacking the old terminal building, where they killed seven terrorists and, after instructing the hostages in Hebrew to lie down to avoid being shot at, rescued all of them except three who were killed inadvertently; destroying between six and 10 Ugandan MiG fighters near the far end of the airport's old runway; and guarding the airport's perimeter against any possible Ugandan troop reinforcements, which, however, never arrived. In addition to the hostages killed, Lieut.-Colonel Nethaniyahu was shot dead by a Ugandan soldier who had climbed the roof of the control tower; five hostages and four Israeli soldiers were wounded, one of the latter dying later in Nairobi.

An attempt to refuel the Israeli aircraft at Entebbe was abandoned after a few minutes, and all three planes left for the Embakasi airport in Kenya, where they landed at 1 a.m. on July 4. After they had refuelled and the medical team in the Boeing had carried out several operations on the wounded, all aircraft departed between 2.27 and 4.08 a.m. local time, arriving at Lod airport in Israel in the course of Sunday morning (July 4).

Lieut.-General Shomron said after his return to Israel that the Ugandan soldiers and the terrorists had been "utterly surprised", and General Gur stated on July 8 that the whole operation, from the moment of landing at Entebbe to the departure for Kenya, had taken 52 to 53 minutes, and that it appeared that, apart from the seven terrorists killed, another three had escaped.

In a message sent to the UN Secretary-General (Dr Kurt Waldheim) and to the President of the Organization of African Unity (Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, Prime Minister of Mauritius) on July 4 [see below], President Amin (who had cut short his attendance at the OAU heads of state and government meeting in Port Louis—see page 27885) gave details of the Israeli attack as follows:

"On the night of July 3 three Zionist Israeli transport planes landed by surprise and without any authority from the Uganda Government at Entebbe international airport. Soon after landing, they proceeded straight to the old airport building, where the hostages and the crew of the French airbus... were being held by Palestinian commandos.

"Out of the aircraft two military jeeps drove and invaders using machine-guns and bazookas started shooting indiscriminately at the airport building and at the Ugandan soldiers who had surrounded the building at a distance of 200 metres and were armed only with light arms in accordance with the condition laid down by the hijackers of the French plane.

"The Israeli raiders swiftly mounted an attack on the hijackers, killing seven of them and some hostages, as well as a number of Ugandan soldiers, and injuring many others. The Israeli raiders also blasted the old airport building, inflicting considerable damage on quite a number of Ugandan aircraft which were parked nearby, and other equipment."

President Amin claimed, in an interview published in the Tel Aviv newspaper *Maariv* on July 4, that his kindness had been repaid with ingratitude. He denied that his soldiers had co-operated with the hijackers and stated that he had planned to continue his efforts to secure the release of the hostages and that he had ordered his troops not to fire on the Israeli planes.

In Israel both Mr Rabin and Mr Peres emphasized on July 4 that responsibility for the rescue action rested entirely with Israel, and they denied any rumour of "complicity" of other countries. Mr Rabin also said that Israel had been sincere in wishing to negotiate and that the decision in favour of military action had been taken only after it had been established that negotiations could not succeed, and despite the enormous risks involved" both for the hostages and for the troops employed.

The Israeli Government also denied on July 4 a Ugandan allegation that the Israeli aircraft had refuelled in Kenya before landing at Entebbe. The Government of Kenya made no statement on the matter but was understood to maintain that it had not been consulted beforehand on the operation. It was acknowledged, however, that without refuelling at Nairobi after the raid the Hercules transport aircraft would not have been able to return to Israel—a distance of about 2,500 miles.

In a statement issued also on July 4 the Israeli Government declared that it was guided by two basic principles— (i) that "the state of Israel was created to ensure that never again should Jews perish for lack of home and haven" and (ii) that "there can be no concession to terrorism" which was "threatening the very survival of an already fragile system of international law and order". The statement also said that all the evidence suggested that the hijacking had been systematically planned by the PFLP and "aided and abetted by President Amin"

President Amin himself confirmed on July 4 that 20 Ugandan soldiers and seven terrorists (two Germans and five Palestinians) had been killed and 13 Ugandan soldiers seriously wounded.

,[Israeli intelligence had earlier identified three of the terrorists killed at Entebbe as Ilaj Fayez al Jaber (a Palestinian in charge of external operations) Mr Jahil al Arja (another Palestinian, head of South American operations) and Mr Abu Bardai (an Iranian). Uganda Radio had on July 5 given the names of the Palestinian terrorists killed as Haj Fayez a) Jaber, Abdul Razak al Khamarieh, Sayer al Aza, Abu Khalid al Kalanzi and Abu All. In an obituary in the Kuwait newspaper *Al -Watan* on July 6, Haj Fayez al Jaber was described as the PFLP's commander of "special operations"].

President Amin also said that "several" Ugandan aircraft had been destroyed and that his forces had not wanted to shoot at the Israeli aircraft in order not to kill the innocent people on board.

A spokesman for the crew of the French airbus said after his return to Paris that the hostages' detention at Entebbe airport had taken place under comparatively good conditions, and that thanks were due to President Amin for ensuring the hostages' material and sanitary comfort, as he had placed a doctor and a nurse at their disposal.

The Syndicat national des pilotes de ligne (the French airline pilots' association), in a statement issued on July 9, condemned "the principle of armed intervention in the case of aircraft hijackings" because of the immense danger to the hostages, and insisted that only strict adherence to preventive measures, combined with the signing of international agreements, would make it possible to forestall hijackings.

Dr Waldheim, the UN Secretary-General, categorically denied on July 5 that he had described the Israeli action as "flagrant aggression" (as stated in a Reuter report translated from a Middle East News Agency news item from Cairo) and declared that he had merely referred to it as a "violation of the sovereignty of a UN member-state". He emphasized at the same time that the incident underlined the urgency of finding effective ways of dealing with "the increasingly pervasive and pernicious practice of international terrorism".

The Israeli action was, however, generally received with satisfaction in many Western countries, with both President Ford of the USA and Herr Helmut Schmidt, the West German Federal Chancellor, sending messages expressing great satisfaction to Mr Rabin.

While the British Government confined itself to stating on July 5 "We are pleased that the hostages' lives have been saved and that the hijacking attempt has failed" opinion among British members of Parliament was divided with many on both sides of the House of Commons welcoming Israel's action.

Dr Rhodes Boyson said (C) that it had "done more for the rule of law" than the United Nations had done in 20 years and was "probably the most outstanding feat of arms of the past 25 years". Mr Neville Sanderson (Lab) said that it was "a brilliantly executed rescue operation" and that Israel's "refusal to bow the knee to tinpot tyrants and her resolute defence of her democratic institutions" was, "a lesson to all of us in the West". Mr David Watkins (Lab), however, declared that he must condemn "the whole mentality behind the rescue" and that those who were praising it should be asking "whether Britain should be invading the Republic of Ireland or attacking Northern Ireland against the IRA".

Most Arab countries refrained from comment but the Egyptian Government called the Israeli raid a terrorist theatrical demonstration", which reflected "the true terrorist face of the Zionist state", and the Government of Iraq also strongly condemned it.

In Kenya, the Government-influenced daily newspaper *The Standard* expressed it as, the commonly held view in Kenya that President Amin had co-operated with the pro-Palestinian hijackers, and it added "The rescue operation must serve as a useful lesson for emergent Africa. It completely obliterated Field-Marshal Amin's phoney invincibility, taught him and his terrorist Arab heroes' (and heroines), wherever they are around the world, an unforgettable lesson, and proved to the Ugandan regime the bluntness and morbidity of the... Russian missiles it has installed at... Entebbe airport."

President Amin informed M. Renard on July 21 that the French airbus, which had until then been held at Entebbe, was released "without conditions", and he asked for it to be flown out of Uganda. The aircraft accordingly left Entebbe for Paris on June 22, though without either any of

the hostages' luggage, which was presumed to have been looted in Uganda, or their passports, which the Israeli Government feared could be used for forging documents.

Earlier, on July 12 President Amin was reported to have asked his "friend" Colonel Bar-Lev to inform Mr Rabin that he was "finished with terrorists" because they had caused him "a lot of trouble", and to ask whether Israel could send him spare parts for military equipment which it had supplied to Uganda before 1972. At the same time the President was reported to have said that " as a Military man, not a politician", he appreciated the Israeli commando action and to have claimed credit for facilitating it by removing mines placed around the old terminal building by the hijackers.

Inconclusive UN security Council Debate

At an urgent session called for by Mauritius (for the Organization of African Unity—see page 27886) and Mauritania (for the African group at the United Nations), the UN security Council debated on July 9 and 12–14 the following two resolutions:

(1) A draft submitted jointly by the United States and the United Kingdom, condemning hijacking and "all other acts which threaten the lives of passengers and crews and the safety of international aviation"; calling on all states to prevent and punish terrorist acts; and at the same time reaffirming the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states in accordance with the UN Charter and international law; and

(2) A draft by African states (Benin, Libya and Tanzania), condemning "Israel's brazen and naked aggression" in the commando raid on Entebbe airport and demanding that Israel should compensate Uganda for the damage caused during the raid [The draft resolution made no mention of the hijacking or of the question of terrorism in general.]

The first of these resolutions failed to be adopted because it received only six of the required nine votes for approval—being supported, in addition to its sponsors, only by Finance, Italy, Japan and Sweden, with no votes being cast against it, Panama and Romania abstaining, and the remaining members of the Council (Benin, China, Guyana, Libya, Pakistan, the Soviet Union and Tanzania) declining to take part in the vote.

The second draft resolution was not pressed to a vote after Mr Salim A. Salim (Tanzania) had stated that it had not been possible to treat the complaint on its merits, because of confrontations which had taken place and a determination shown in the US-UK draft to "gloss over" the complaint.

In a message sent to the President of the security Council (and the UN Secretary-General and the President of the OAU) on July 4, President Amin had accused "certain states", among them Kenya, of collaborating with Israel: had asked that Israel should be condemned " in the strongest possible terms" for the aggression committed: and had reserved Uganda's right to proceed to reprisals.

Lieut.-Colonel Juma Oris Abdalla, the Ugandan Foreign Minister, accused Israel on July 9 of having subjected Uganda to "barbaric aggression" at a time when President Amin had been doing everything possible to protect and secure the release of the hostages being held by the hijackers. He categorically denied that Uganda had collaborated with the hijackers who had carried explosives and automatic weapons.

Mr Chaim Herzog (Israel's permanent representative) devoted much of his statement to the question of Uganda's collusion with the hijackers, claiming that Herr Bose had known in advance that the aircraft's destination was, to be Entebbe and had, on landing there, told his German accomplice that all was "in order" as the Army was at the airport: that among the Ugandan troops surrounding the aircraft there had been five armed Arab terrorists who had embraced the hijackers and taken part in guarding the hostages and in the negotiations: and that President Amin had been seen to embrace and shake hands with the terrorists, who had later been supplied with arms by the Ugandans. Furthermore, he said, not only the Ugandan soldiers killed but also the dead terrorists had been hurled with full military honours.

Israel's action, Mr Herzog continued, was justified in natural and in international law, and Uganda had violated the norms of international law and in particular the Hague Convention of 1970 on the suppression of hijacking [see 24456 A]. He also called on the security Council to declare war on international terrorism, as Israel had shown that there was an alternative to surrendering to blackmail: if this was not possible, he said, all free nations should, outside the United Nations, combine to set up norms against terrorism and take effective economic, political and technical measures against those who were unwilling to respect these norms.

Dr Munyua Walyaki, the Kenyan Foreign Minister, rejected the charges by Uganda that Kenya had collaborated in the Israeli action and emphasized that it was, only for humanitarian reasons that his Government had allowed the Israeli aircraft to land in Kenya: he also denied that Palestinian guerrillas were being held in Kenya; and he joined the other Arab states in accusing Israel of aggression.

[In a letter to the Council, published in Nairobi on July 8, Dr Waiyaki had vigorously attacked President Amin as, "a war-mongering neighbour" and the "dictatorial fascist ruler of Uganda", who by his "elimination and liquidation of brainpower in Uganda" had "done more damage to Uganda and East Africa as a whole... than any that mankind can imagine without seeing a Hitler". Dr Waiyaki accused "the sadist Amin" of having "driven the Government and the people of Kenya to the point where tolerance and willingness to understand are no more a virtue", and in his letter he also enumerated acts of "savagery", "torture" and "mass murder" of Ugandans whose "only crime was having been within reach of the Ugandan armed forces when they went berserk."

M. Jacques Lecompte, (France) stated that his Government regarded hijackings as "intolerable violations of international morality" which could not be justified by any political considerations, and, without naming Israel, he expressed his delegation's thanks for the liberation of the hostages. He also disclosed that M. Pierre Renard, the French ambassador in Kampala, had requested the Ugandan authorities to permit the airbus to land at Entebbe.

Mr William Scranton (USA), said on July 12 that, though Uganda's sovereignty had been "temporarily" violated, a state had "the right to use limited force to protect its nationals", and he added: "The USA wishes the UN to go to the root of the evil and to take all measures necessary so that the senseless crime of air piracy should not be repeated."

Mr Kaj Sundberg (Sweden), taking a neutral stand, said: "My Government cannot reconcile Israel's action with the Charter but neither can it condemn Israel in this matter."

Mr Salim stated inter alia : "The Council has this choice : it can legitimize anarchy or ensure the rule of law.... [you must] understand that for too long Africa has been humiliated and occupied to be able to understand such violation of her sovereignty.... Israel is treating Africa with contempt; it has never done anything like this against an Arab country."

Israel was similarly denounced by the Soviet Union and, among non-members of the Council, by Guinea, Somalia and Yugoslavia, while China also supported the African draft resolution.

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