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Syria Releases Captive U.S. Flier to Rev. Jackson

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Reagan Expresses Admiration

Syria Jan. 3 freed captured U.S. flier Navy Lt. Robert O. Goodman Jr. following a dramatic personal appeal by Rev. Jesse Jackson to Syrian President Hafez al-Assad. [See 1983 [Reverend Jackson Goes to Syria; Seeks Captive Airman's Release](#)]

The Syrian foreign ministry said Goodman's release was attributable to the "human appeal" of Jackson's mission and also to U.S. demands. President Reagan, who earlier had expressed concern over Jackson's mission to Syria, was quick to praise the Democratic presidential candidate for his success.

Before leaving the U.S., Jackson had received no guarantees from Syria that he would be permitted to meet with President Assad. He had originally planned to leave Syria Jan. 2, but said Jan. 1 that he was extending his visit by one day in order to meet with the president. Jackson said, "We would rather wait here in Syria with the possibility of getting Robert Goodman free than to be back home hoping that it would happen." Jackson added that expressions of opposition in the U.S. Congress to the continued presence of U.S. Marines in Lebanon could be helpful in his meeting with Assad.

Jackson and Assad met on the afternoon of Jan. 2 in a villa outside Damascus. After the meeting, Assad refused to disclose whether Goodman was to be released. Jackson declined to answer reporters' questions, stating, "We're in a very sensitive stage. . . . Our mission of mercy continues. It is not over."

Late that night Jackson again delayed his return after he received a Syrian request to hold further meetings the following morning.

Following a meeting with Foreign Minister Abdel Halim Khaddam on the morning of Jan. 3, Jackson announced at a news conference that "our prayers have been answered." He disclosed that Goodman was to be released that morning "upon the instructions of President Hafez Assad." U.S. Ambassador Robert G. Paganelli, who was also present at the news conference, added that the release was "in response to and associated with the appeals the U.S. government has made to the government of Syria for [Goodman's] release on humanitarian grounds." The Syrian foreign ministry said Goodman's release was a response to both Jackson's "human appeal" and the demands of the U.S. government. The ministry described the action as a contribution that would create "circumstances that would facilitate the withdrawal of American troops from Lebanon."

Both Jackson and Paganelli said Syria had agreed unconditionally to release Goodman. U.S. diplomatic sources in Syria had previously voiced doubts that Assad would free Goodman without substantial U.S. concessions, if indeed Assad agreed to his release at all.

Goodman and Jackson and his 14-member entourage left Syria later Jan. 3 and arrived at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland early Jan. 4, after a brief stop-over at Rhein-Main Air Base in West Germany.

In interviews in Damascus and on the flight to West Germany, Goodman Jan. 3-4 revealed details of his month in captivity. He said his captors had beaten him on the face and body with their fists during several interrogations that took place in the early days of his imprisonment.

Goodman said the beatings stopped after Red Cross members visited him on the fourth day and that he found the subsequent kind treatment he received "unnerving." Goodman said he had been interrogated about "military things" but that he had kept his answers "very vague."

In a television interview by satellite from Rhein-Main Air Base Jan. 4, Jackson said he believed Assad released Goodman because holding him would be "a major impediment" to a U.S. withdrawal from Lebanon. He urged President Reagan to "communicate with Mr. Assad directly" on the Middle East crisis. Jackson commented, "The position of former Vice President [Walter F.] Mondale and that of Sen. [Barry] Goldwater made it very clear to Mr. Assad that he could hold Lt. Goodman longer and therefore become a major impediment to breaking the cycle of pain or he could in fact make this humanitarian gesture, free Lt. Goodman and in some way contribute to the force in the [U.S.] to withdraw troops from Lebanon."

In an interview, Jackson alluded to the New Hampshire Democratic primary due to take place in February when he said, "It is poetic justice that Lt. Goodman is from Portsmouth, New Hampshire." Jackson said, "There are political consequences in every moral act. . . . There was risk in this mission, and there will be reward."

Goodman was greeted at Andrews Air Force Base by his wife and two children, his mother and his two brothers. Several hundred Jackson campaign workers and supporters were also on hand to welcome the party home. Goodman told them he appreciated the mail--some 60,000 pieces--he had received while in captivity.

Reagan Thanks Assad, Jackson

President Reagan Jan. 3 sent a letter to President Assad thanking him for freeing Goodman. He also said of Jackson's mission, "You can't quarrel with success."

White House officials earlier had cautioned that Jackson's trip could stand in the way of the administration's efforts to free Goodman.

Reagan said Syria's action presented "an opportune moment" for the U.S. and Syria "to put all the issues on the table."

White House spokesman Larry Speakes said Jan. 3 that Reagan had spoken to Goodman and Jackson by telephone that morning and that the President had told Jackson, "I have been praying for you. I couldn't be happier."

Although the mission had no immediate repercussions in Lebanon, Pentagon officials disclosed Jan. 5 that the U.S. aircraft carrier Independence had begun an eight-day port call in Naples. The move was portrayed as a normal rotation of forces, but it marked the first time since November 1983 that the U.S. had not had two aircraft carriers off the Lebanese coast, and U.S. officials told the Washington Post that it would not have been approved unless there had been some lessening of tensions in Lebanon. [See 1984 [Lebanon: France to Cut Beirut Force](#)]

Airman Welcomed at White House

President Reagan met with Jackson and Goodman at the White House Jan. 4, hours after they arrived back in the U.S.

Reagan praised Goodman for "exemplifying qualities of leadership and loyalty" and said Jackson's "mission of mercy" had "earned our gratitude and our admiration." In turn, Jackson praised Reagan for sending a letter to Syrian President Assad calling for cooperation in bringing peace to Lebanon. He said the action proved that "we have the capacity to save this generation from disaster."

Before making his public statement, Reagan met with Jackson privately. According to Larry Speakes, Reagan told Jackson that he had not replied to telephone calls Jackson made to him before leaving for Syria because of "initial misgivings" about his mission. Speakes said Reagan believed that the mission would have a better chance of success if the President "kept hands off" and showed that Jackson was not acting as an emissary for the U.S.

White House officials cited in the Washington Post Jan. 4 said Reagan's gestures aimed at showing that he bore no resentment for Jackson's success in bringing about what the administration had been unable to achieve. They said Jackson's success would hurt other Democratic presidential hopefuls more than it would harm Reagan.

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