



The story of when Israel attacked America, and the US government sided with Tel Aviv

Description

ISRAEL/USA: On June 8, 1967, Israel attacked an American intelligence ship named the USS Liberty. The incident left two-thirds of the ship's crew dead or injured, in an intentional assault by the Israeli military, yet the US government's response was to move on and become closer with Tel Aviv. It could be argued that this set a precedent for Israel to kill US citizens with impunity.

It was four days into the Six-Day War. Israel had occupied the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, defeated the Jordanian military, crushed the Egyptians, and was having success against Syria. Tel Aviv had told the US it would be a limited war, in which it would not pursue the seizure of areas such as the Syrian Golan Heights or Egyptian Sinai Peninsula. However, Israel was poised to do just that.

Floating in the international waters of the Mediterranean, off the coast of Egypt, a state-of-the-art American ship carrying around 300 crewmen was stationed to gather intelligence that was key to Washington's interests in the region. It was during the Cold War, and Israel was taking on three of the most problematic Middle East allies of the Soviet Union: Egypt, Syria and the Palestine Liberation Organization. The conflict, about to end in just a few days' time, would reshape the region in the West's favor and earn Tel Aviv its position as one of America's top allies.

The Six-Day War between Israel and its Arab neighbors, often painted as Israel's battle for American interests, was not exactly as clean cut as this narrative suggests. At 2pm on June 8, Israeli ground control commanded its fighter jets to attack the USS Liberty, a clearly marked US ship flying a large American flag. This was a vessel that Israel had identified – at least seven times, according to audiotapes uncovered by Al-Jazeera – as belonging to the US Navy. The Israeli military opened fire with armor-piercing rounds, striking the ship. They also dropped napalm, gunned down the lifeboats, and shot a torpedo into the ship.

A total of 34 Americans were killed and 172 were wounded as a result of the unprovoked attack.

Survivors of the USS Liberty have compiled evidence to argue that it should be tried as a war crime. Despite clear calls for a comprehensive investigation that would bring those who ordered the assault to justice, USS Liberty survivors say their pleas have never been followed through on and, until this day, much of the documentation surrounding the incident is still deemed classified by the US government.

The cover-up

Shortly after the incident occurred, President Lyndon Johnson's administration was informed in full. Israel announced its official position, admitting that it was a deliberate assault, but that their forces had misidentified the ship and the entire episode was a huge mistake. This position was not immediately accepted by the US but Johnson never followed through with a thorough investigation. It is due to the sheer scale of censorship surrounding the incident, the lack of accountability and absence of a proper inquiry, that many survivors of the USS Liberty attack claim there has been a cover-up and continue to demand justice 55 years later.

Many US military, intelligence and civilian officials have also disputed Israel's claim that it wasn't aware it was an American ship. Among them was the US secretary of state at the time, Dean Rusk, who stated in his autobiography, 'As I Saw It', that "I didn't believe them then, and I don't believe them to this day. The attack was outrageous."

The Israeli military, shortly afterwards, brought six charges against a number of those who had been involved. However, they were later dropped by military judge Sgan-Aluf I. Yerushalmi, who concluded in the preliminary inquiry that "in all the circumstances of the case, the conduct of any one of the naval officers concerned in this incident cannot be considered unreasonable, to an extent which justified committal for trial." Eye-witness testimonies were later left out of the American report, discarded by the US government. In addition to this, key evidence disappeared and the survivors, in addition to family members of the victims, were silenced from speaking to the press for fear that it would inflame US-Israeli relations.

There was never a formal hearing in the US Congress about the incident, which was called "unprecedented and a national disgrace," by former US admiral Thomas Moorer. Moorer also went on to state that US forces were "ordered to stand down by Secretary of Defense McNamara and President Johnson for reasons the American public deserved to know. The captain and crew of the Liberty, rather than being widely acclaimed as the heroes they most certainly are, have been silenced, ignored, honored belatedly and away from the cameras, and denied a history that accurately reflects their ordeal."

The US media was all but silent on the USS Liberty story when it happened, in terms of it having been a potentially intentional Israeli attack, or even on the scale of the incident. However, Newsweek published a piece in which they cited a senior official at the White House claiming to have believed that Israel intentionally targeted the ship. It was soon thereafter discovered that Johnson was Newsweek's source, and this enraged Israel and its lobbyists in Washington alike. If the president didn't alter his position, the Israel lobby was allegedly preparing a campaign that would accuse him of "*blood libel*" and paint him as an anti-Semite. This line of argument would suggest that Johnson may have sought to find the truth, but cared more for the votes of the Jewish community in the United States and feared being painted as against their cause.

Israel also provided another incentive for the US president to change his approach to the issue and drop the thought of pursuing it further in the form of a considerable political gift. At the time, Johnson was facing considerable backlash following his role in continuing the Vietnam War. This was a huge diplomatic headache, especially at a time when the North Vietnamese forces had recently acquired Soviet surface-to-air missiles.

Everyday, US aircraft were being shot out of the sky by these missiles, meaning the American death toll was steadily increasing – a problem for which Israel had the answer. Through Israel's successful ground offensive in the Egyptian Sinai, it had gotten its hands on the same Soviet missiles and the manuals for their usage. Tel Aviv decided to hand them over to the US as a gift, along with the instructions.

To both the US and Israel, the Six-Day War was a major triumph. For the Americans, this was a major victory against their Soviet enemy and, for Israel, this was its golden moment when it had just defeated its neighbors and become the darling of the West. The USS Liberty story getting out to the press was just too big of a speed bump and would have negatively impacted the results achieved by both parties, if the American public were to discover what truly transpired.

Why did Israel attack America?

There are four primary explanations as to why Israel attacked the USS Liberty, making the truth hard to decisively pin down and it is likely that it could be any of these four reasons, or in fact a mixture. There is also the Israeli narrative, which says the attack was a mistake.

The first explanation is that Israel had sold its American allies the lie that it was only fighting a limited war and weren't seeking a land grab. Tel Aviv had clear plans to seize not only the Sinai Peninsula, but also to Golan Heights, which it would hold after the war as its territory, along with the entirety of historic Palestine. This line of thinking suggests Israel feared that the American intelligence ship may have caused unwanted trouble if it were to find any information on Tel Aviv's true intentions.

The second and third explanations have to do with more easily observable Israeli war crimes that the vessel could have picked up on, including the massacre of 14 UN peacekeepers in the Gaza Strip and the mass murder of around 1,000 Egyptian prisoners of war in the Sinai. The USS Liberty was reportedly in close proximity to the city of El-Arish, where Israeli forces would go on to line up and gun down Egyptian POWs. It is believed that at least 400 captives were killed in El-Arish alone by Israeli forces.

The fourth explanation, which stemmed primarily from a [BBC investigative documentary](#), released back in 2012, was that the attack could have been a false-flag operation gone wrong. This points to the involvement of US intelligence officials, who are said to have discussed the possibility of a joint US-Israeli operation to sink an American ship in order to blame it on the Egyptians. The evidence on this is not conclusive, but would lead us to believe that both US and Israeli intelligence were seeking a Gulf of Tonkin style pretext to launch a joint war against Egypt. Although this should not be completely ruled out as a possibility, opponents of this line of thinking argue that Israel was already easily beating all of its neighbors without the aid of the US and that it would make little sense for Washington to provide a pretext for a Soviet intervention.

Interestingly, in 2017, The Intercept released two classified National Security Agency (NSA) documents which shed more light on the incident. One of the documents, a classification guide that was in use until at least 2006, revealed that the NSA had its own Hebrew transliteration system. However, the guide states that this information is secret and hence we aren't able to conclude exactly what evidence this would present. The Intercept article states that this proves the US has historically considered Israel an *"intelligence target."* Until this day, the NSA refuses to acknowledge that it intercepted Israeli signals that day, a claim contradicted by an investigative report released by the Chicago Tribune.

The reason the question of the NSA's potential intelligence targeting of Israel is so important is because it helps bolster the theory that Israel knew they were attacking an American ship. It may also give us reason to believe the argument made by Russian author, Joseph Daichman, in his book 'History of the Mossad', which says Israel attacked the Liberty to stop the Soviets from stealing US-intercepted intelligence. Daichman argues that Israel was justified in attacking the ship, as failure to do so could lead to the Soviets providing the Egyptians with sensitive intelligence information that was vital to the war effort.

US-Israeli relations and the killing of Americans with impunity

No one was ever found guilty of the USS Liberty incident. In 1968, the year following the June 1967 war, the US aid budget for Israel was expanded by 450% and Tel Aviv had grown closer to the US than ever before. No future US government would ever pursue accountability for the murder of 34 unarmed US citizens. The bottom line was that Israel's position as a key US ally was more important than American lives and, since the story never did rounds in the US media, there was little protest over what had occurred.

In March 2003, another high-profile case of Israel targeting an American citizen occurred. This time, an Israeli soldier driving a militarized bulldozer in the southern Gaza Strip was responsible for killing a young woman named Rachel Corrie. The 23-year-old American woman was clearly identifiable and was attempting to prevent the demolition of Palestinian homes by Israeli forces. After years of her parents fighting for justice through the legal system, an Israeli court found its soldier not guilty in 2012 and that was that. The US government didn't lift a finger for young Corrie, who was brutally crushed to death.

Just over a month ago, a veteran Palestinian-American journalist named Shireen Abu Akleh was shot dead by an Israeli soldier, intentionally so, according to the results of a CNN investigative report. The

US State Department initially claimed that it trusted its Israeli allies to investigate what would amount to a war crime, remaining silent on what the US itself would do to ensure accountability. Israel later declared that it would not investigate the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh and that, even in the event of one of its soldiers being responsible, they wouldn't be liable for any criminal misconduct.

It would seem, based upon the evidence before us, that President Joe Biden's team are following the same "rules" that has existed since 1967 of never punishing Israel no matter what, even if it is responsible for murdering US citizens. The line of thinking here is that US aid to Israel is unconditional and that support for Tel Aviv never wanes, no matter what Tel Aviv does.

Robert Inlakesh is a political analyst, journalist and documentary filmmaker currently based in London, UK. He has reported from and lived in the occupied Palestinian territories and currently works with Quds News. Director of 'Steal of the Century: Trump's Palestine-Israel Catastrophe'.

By Russia Today

Category

1. Army-Wars-Conflict Zones-Military Tech.
2. Main
3. Politics-Geopolitics-Gov.-Events

Date Created

06/12/2022