

Israel was quick to work with the Maronite Christian militias, who were fighting the Palestinian groups based in the refugee camps. In 1974, Israel's current defense minister, Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, served as a liaison to these Christian militias.

Sharon's grand scheme in 1982 was to dismember Lebanon, set up a Maronite puppet state which would stretch from Beirut to Israel's northern border, and expel the 100,000 Palestinian refugees living in southern Lebanon. Through such a scheme, Sharon hoped to secure the Golan Heights, with its water resources, as well as the Litani River, one of the most important rivers in Lebanon and the region.

The PFLP-GC, led by Jihad Jibril's father Ahmed, is one of the most militant of the Palestinian factions in the so-called Rejection Front. The group is sponsored by Syria, and has been thrown out of the Palestine Liberation Organization, but is active in the Palestinian camps in Lebanon, particularly those in the north, where the PLO is not strongly supported. Its operations in the occupied territories have been minimal, although its fighters are extremely effective, and are said to have been responsible for several highly effective attacks, destroying Israeli tanks and attacking Israeli military outposts. It has also engaged in several spectacular international terrorist operations, including airplane hijackings.

Ramzi Iranya comes from the diametrically opposite end of the Lebanese political spectrum. The 36-year-old engineer was a leader in the Maronite Lebanese Forces Party, which is the only faction that has been outlawed. Its leader, Samir Geagea, is currently sitting in a Lebanese jail. In 1982, Sharon sought to make its leader, Bashir Gemayel, President of Lebanon, only to see him assassinated. The militia associated with these people was the most bitter enemy of the Palestinians, and Sharon deployed them into the Sabra and Chatila refugee camps to conduct one of the worst massacres of civilians since World War II. It was Elie Hobeika who led these Christian militias, with the aid of the Israeli military.

Is Israel trying to rekindle a Lebanese civil war, by sparking Palestinian-Maronite strife?

Sharon Needs War To Stop Netanyahu

Sharon knows he cannot survive, economically or politically, unless he continues his drive for war. Domestically no longer in the shadows, is Sharon's chief rival, Benjamin Netanyahu, who challenged Sharon at a Likud party central committee meeting early in May, where a resolution was passed, sponsored by Netanyahu, rejecting any Palestinian state; this was ballyhooed as a defeat for Sharon. The recent crisis over an emergency economic austerity plan, which led Sharon to throw out of his Cabinet two of his major coalition partners—Shas and the United Torah Judaism party—could lead to the collapse of his government and new elections.

An Israeli intelligence source warned that if Sharon decides to go for new elections, he would launch a military operation, either a massive attack on the Gaza Strip, or an attack on the Syrian-Lebanon front.

A 35-Year Cover-Up

When Israel Attacked The USS Liberty

by Edward Spannaus

Thirty-five years ago, on June 8, 1967, the Israeli Defense Forces knowingly and intentionally attacked and tried to sink a U.S. Navy ship, the *USS Liberty*, 12 miles off the Gaza coast. Thirty-four Americans were killed, and 171 injured, many seriously. The deliberate murder of these U.S. servicemen was covered up from the beginning, with survivors being ordered to keep silent, or face court martial and imprisonment. Congress has never held a public hearing on the matter—making this the only major American maritime incident in history which has not been investigated by Congress.

George Ball, who served as Undersecretary of State in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, identified the significance of the *Liberty* affair as follows: "Yet the ultimate lesson of the *Liberty* attack had far more effect on policy in Israel than in America. Israel's leaders concluded that nothing they might do would offend the Americans to the point of reprisal. If America's leaders did not have the courage to punish Israel for the blatant murder of American citizens, it seemed clear that their American friends would let them get away with anything."

Yet, we must take this one step further, so as not to leave the mistaken impression that it is Israel that controls U.S. policy. Israel was never an independent entity, but has always served as an instrument of an Anglo-American interest that wanted a permanent destabilizing factor in the Middle East. As Lyndon LaRouche put it in his May 1 webcast: "No, it is not the Israelis who control the Zionist Lobby, who control the United States. It is an Anglo-American faction of this type, which has an instrument inside Israel, called the right-wing Likud, typified by Netanyahu, who's more dangerous than Sharon is. These guys are the killers who are doing the work of the Anglo-American Roman Legion mentality in the Middle East."

The 1967 War—A Turning Point

The 1967 war was clearly a turning point in the Middle East conflict: The Israeli seizure and occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights set the stage for bringing the Jabotinsky-ite Likud party to power in the 1970s, and as well for the current conflict which threatens to spill over at any moment into regional or even general warfare.

Also, 1967 was a key nodal point for U.S. policy. As we have shown, the first half of the 1960s marked the takeover of the U.S. military establishment by the utopian faction, which had been held in check under President Dwight Eisenhower; and after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, his successor Lyndon Johnson lived in fear that he would be next, if he did not toe the line on strategic and military matters. It was only on a few domestic issues, such as civil rights, that LBJ showed any real courage. By 1967, the global financial system was beginning to unravel, which culminated in the complete breakdown of the post-war Bretton Woods system, in 1971.

This is the context in which the cover-up by the U.S. government must be seen; it would be an error to simply attribute it to pressure from Israel and the Israeli lobby here—as substantial as that pressure may have been. The cover-up could not have been successful unless there were U.S. complicity in the Israeli launching and conduct of the 1967 war. Who in the United States wished to carry out this cover-up? That is the question which is still to be fully answered.

Israel's Need for Secrecy

The *USS Liberty* was a World War II-era freighter, refitted as a “Technical Research Ship,” a polite name for an electronic intelligence collection ship. As tensions rose between Israel and Egypt in May 1967, it was redeployed from the West African coast to the Mediterranean, off Port Said, Egypt, then ordered to deploy just off the coasts of Israel and Egypt, but no closer than 12.5 nautical miles off Egypt.

On June 5, Israel launched its Air Force against Egypt's air bases, sent tanks across the Sinai toward the Suez Canal, and attacked at the Jordanian and Syrian borders. The entire Israeli offensive was accompanied by elaborate, falsified reports that Egypt had launched a major attack, and Israel was simply defending itself. These lies were communicated directly to the U.S. Ambassador to Israel, among others.

As a number of analysts have noted—ranging from U.S. naval historian Richard K. Smith writing in the *Naval Institute Proceedings* in June 1978, to author James Bamford in his recent book *Body of Secrets* on the U.S. National Security Agency—an essential element of Israel's war plan, was to prevent the rest of the world, including the United States, from knowing what it was doing, until its war aims had been accomplished, and its territorial conquests could be presented as a *fait accompli*.

“Any instrument which sought to penetrate this smoke screen so carefully thrown around the normal ‘fog of war’ would have to be frustrated,” Smith wrote. It was into this smoke screen, that the electronic surveillance ship, with dozens of National Security Agency (NSA) personnel aboard, including linguists, sailed on June 8.

There are numerous accounts of what happened that

day, from the close-in surveillance of the *Liberty* by Israeli aircraft beginning at about 6:00 that morning, to the brutal attacks on the *Liberty* which took place in wave after wave for over two hours, beginning shortly after 2:00 p.m. (A number such accounts, and other valuable information, are available at www.usliberty.org.)

There can be absolutely no question but that the Israelis knew they were attacking an American ship. It was a clear day, with the *Liberty* clearly marked as a U.S. ship and flying an American flag. Starting with the first Israeli reconnaissance plane, the Israelis who periodically flew around the *Liberty* were close enough for the respective crews to wave to each other. The ship had its name and the ship's number, GTR-5, in large block letters on its sides. (“GTR” stood for General Technical Research, the designation for NSA's fleet of spy ships).

The Two-Hour Attack

It is documented that, by 10:55 a.m., Israeli Naval Headquarters had identified the *Liberty* as an American ship, and its “GTR-5” designation had been confirmed in the reference book *Jane's Fighting Ships* by the Israeli Navy liaison at Israeli Air Force headquarters.

The first Mirage fighter planes that attacked the *Liberty* were unmarked; they raked the deck back and forth with cannon and machine-gun fire. First to be attacked were crew members and the ship's few gun mounts, then the antennas and communications equipment, which was destroyed within the first minute of the attack. At the same time, the Israelis were jamming the *Liberty*'s communications frequency—strange behavior in light of the later Israeli claim that they thought they were attacking an Egyptian freighter, whose frequency would have been much different. The Israelis then attacked the ship's steel plating with armor-piercing shells, which penetrated deep into the ship's living quarters, killing and maiming more of the crew. Then came a wave of Super Mystere fighters, attacking with thousand-pound bombs and napalm. Intercepts from the Israeli pilots make it clear—were there any doubt—that the intention was to sink the *Liberty*, not merely to disable it.

A few minutes later, three Israeli torpedo boats approached, firing cannon into the *Liberty*'s side. At 2:37 p.m., four torpedoes were launched. One hit, entering the NSA's quarters and killing almost everyone inside, either from the blast, or by drowning.

Then, in a remarkable display of *chutzpah*, one of the Israeli boats flashed a signal asking “Do you require assistance?” The *Liberty*'s captain, Commander William L. McGonagle, himself seriously injured, responded with the equivalent of “Nuts!,” signalling through flags that his ship was maneuvering with difficulty, and that the Israeli ships should stay clear. Instead, the Israeli boats continued firing at the crew and the ship's firefighter, and even at the lifeboats. Not only the lifeboats still in their racks, but lifeboats put into

the water, were riddled with machine-gun fire and destroyed. Crew members report that it was obvious, that the Israelis intended for there to be *no* survivors. They consider it miraculous, given the extensive damage to the ship and the gaping hole blown in its side, that the *Liberty* did not sink, but was able to clear the area and limp into port at Malta. Over 800 rocket and missile holes, and over 3,000 holes from armor-piercing bullets, were counted.

In Malta, the surviving officers and crew were interviewed in groups by Rear Adm. Isaac Kidd, who ordered them that “you are never, repeat never, to discuss this with anyone, not even your wives.” He continued: “If you do, you will end your lives in prison—or worse.”

It has also been credibly reported that there were U.S. submarines in the area on a secret mission, and that at least one of the submarines photographed the attack via periscope. The crews of those submarines were ordered never to disclose or discuss what they saw and heard that day.

The NSA did have a high-altitude surveillance plane in the area, which collected intercepts of Israeli military communications. Kept secret for over three decades, author James Bamford did obtain access to some of this information for his recent book, and that material confirms and elaborates previous accounts by others. Likewise, the material he reviewed leaves no doubt that the attack was intentional, and as well shows that the top leadership of the NSA recognized this—despite the persistent Israeli protestations, and the official U.S. version, that the attack was “a case of mistaken identity.”

NSA Director Marshall Carter appointed a task force to investigate the incident; although the details of the investigation, including the intercepted Israeli communications, were never disclosed, the NSA official who headed that task force came to the conclusion, “There is no way that they didn’t know that the *Liberty* was American.” NSA Director Carter himself told Bamford in 1980, on the condition that the information be kept off the record at the time, that “there was no other answer than that it was deliberate.” NSA Deputy Director Lou Tordella told a member of Congress, that he believed “the attack might have been ordered by some senior commander on the Sinai Peninsula who wrongly suspected that the *Liberty* was monitoring his activities.”

We will return shortly to the question of what was happening in the Sinai at that precise moment.

Back in Washington . . .

Before its communications were totally destroyed, the *Liberty* was able to tell the Sixth Fleet that it was under attack. A number of F-4 fighter jets were dispatched from the aircraft carriers *USS Saratoga* and the *USS America*. But then the orders came from Washington, directly from Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, to recall the planes. The White House told the Pentagon that Israel had acknowl-

edged its “mistake” and that the attack had been called off, and that the Israelis would provide assistance to the *Liberty*.

Rear Adm. Lawrence R. Geis, the commander of the carrier force in the Mediterranean, protested the recall of the fighters to McNamara. According to Bamford, Geis reported, “President Lyndon Johnson came on with a comment that he didn’t care if the ship sunk, he would not embarrass his allies.”

A total news blackout on the incident was imposed, and only the scantest of news coverage took place, as the media were dominated by coverage of the Israeli victories and territorial conquests. At the recommendation of the Navy Department, Commander McGonagle was later approved for a Congressional Medal of Honor. But unlike the normal practice, where the Medal is awarded by the President at the White House, the award was presented to McGonagle by the Secretary of the Navy at a small, quiet ceremony, hidden away at the Washington Navy Yard. Adm. Thomas Moorer, then Chief of Naval operations, protested to McNamara, to no avail. (Moorer has since been outspoken, protesting the cover-up of the incident.) Moreover, it was later learned that the State Department had cleared the granting of the award with the Israeli government. Israel did not object; the citation did not mention Israel at all.

Why?

James E. Akins, former U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, and others, have suggested that the Israeli motivation for the attack was to prevent the United States from learning about the Israeli moves to occupy the Golan Heights, with which they wanted no interference.

Even more sinister is the conclusion reached by Bamford, based on his study of NSA material only recently available. At the very moment the *Liberty* was offshore from the Sinai, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) were carrying out a monstrous war crime: systematically murdering hundreds of Egyptian prisoners—civilian and military. This was taking place near El Arish on the Sinai coast, the minaret of which was visible from the *Liberty*, only 13 miles away.

Earlier the same day, IDF forces had killed 14 Indian UN peacekeepers in the Sinai who were on their way to the Gaza Strip. Israeli military historian Aryeh Yitzhaki collected testimony from dozens of IDF soldiers who admitted killing POWs; Yitzhaki’s estimate is that as many as 1,000 Egyptian prisoners were killed in the Sinai. It is likely that the Israelis believed that the *Liberty* had picked up intelligence relating to these atrocities, and were determined to destroy the ship and all evidence it had collected.

That might explain the Israeli motive, but the “who” and the “why” on the U.S. side is still shrouded in mystery. The growing demand in the past two or three years for a full investigation, after 35 years, should aim to answer those questions.