

Israeli Attacks on the US Navy and Marines

"I saw the flag, which had visibly identified the ship as American, riddled with bullet holes, and heard testimony that made it clear that the Israelis intended there be no survivors."

-Captain Ward Boston

Counsel to the US Navy Court of Inquiry's investigation

"Those men were then betrayed and left to die by our own government."

- Admiral Thomas Moorer

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1970-1974

About James Akins and Donald Neff

James Akins was U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia during the Nixon administration. An internationally respected expert on Middle East and energy issues, Akins has been described as "the westerner who knows the most about the Middle East."

Donald Neff has been a journalist for forty years. He spent 16 years in service for *Time Magazine* and has been a regular contributor the *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*. He is the foremost expert on U.S. policy in the Middle East and is the author of five must-read books on the subject.

www.IfAmericansKnew.org

6312 SW Capitol Hwy, #163, Portland, OR 97239 • contact@IfAmericansKnew.org • (202) 631-4060

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Israel Charged with Systematic Harassment of U.S. Marines

By former *Time Magazine* Bureau Chief Donald Neff

IF AMERICANS KNEW MISSION STATEMENT

In a democracy, the ultimate responsibility for a nation's actions rests with its citizens. The top rung of government - the entity with the ultimate power of governance - is the asserted will of the people. Therefore, in any democracy, it is essential that its citizens be fully and accurately informed.

In the United States, currently the most powerful nation on earth, it is even more essential that its citizens receive complete and undistorted information on topics of importance, so that they may wield their extraordinary power with wisdom and intelligence.

Unfortunately, such information is not always forthcoming.

The mission of If Americans Knew is to inform and educate the American public on issues of major significance that are unreported, underreported, or misrepresented in the American media.

It is our belief that when Americans know the facts on a subject, they will, in the final analysis, act in accordance with morality, justice, and the best interests of their nation, and of the world. With insufficient information, or distorted information, they may do the precise opposite.

It is the mission of If Americans Knew to ensure that this does not happen - that the information on which Americans base their actions is complete, accurate, and undistorted by conscious or unconscious bias, by lies of either commission or omission, or by pressures exerted by powerful special interest groups. It is our goal to supply the information essential to those responsible for the actions of the strongest nation on earth - the American people.

NOTES:

- 1 New York Times, 3/18/83. For a detailed review of these clashes, see Green, *Living by the Sword*, pp. 177-92, and Clyde Mark, "The Multinational Force in Lebanon," Congressional Research Service, 5/19/83.
- 2 See "NBC Nightly News," 6:30 PM EST, 3/17/86; also, George C. Wilson, *Washington Post*, 2/5/83.
- 3 Ball, *Error and Betrayal in Lebanon*, p. 51; Cooley, *Payback*, pp. 69-71.
- 4 Frank, *U.S. Marines in Lebanon: 1982-1984*, p. 137.
- 5 Frank, *U.S. Marines in Lebanon: 1982-1984*, Appendix F.
- 6 New York Times, 10/1/82. Also see Cooley, *Payback*, p. 71; Green, *Living by the Sword*, pp. 175-77.
- 7 The text is in New York Times, 9/30/82. Also see Peck, *The Reagan Administration and the Palestinian Question*, p. 76.
- 8 Schiff & Ya'ari, *Israel's Lebanon War*, p. 225.
- 9 "Chronology of the Israeli Invasion of Lebanon," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Summer/Fall 1982, p. 189.
- 10 Green, *Living by the Sword*, pp. 178-80.
- 11 Frank, *U.S. Marines in Lebanon: 1982-1984*, pp. 45-46.
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 Green, *Living by the Sword*, p. 182.
- 14 Frank, *U.S. Marines in Lebanon: 1982-1984*, p. 56.
- 15 New York Times, 2/9/83; "Final Report of the Israeli Commission of Inquiry," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Spring 1983, pp. 89-116.
- 16 Frank, *U.S. Marines in Lebanon: 1982-1984*, p. 56.
- 17 New York Times, 4/22/83 and 4/26/83. For more detail on CIA victims, see Charles R. Babcock, *Washington Post*, 8/5/86, and Woodward, *Veil*, pp. 244-45.
- 18 Ostrovsky, *By Way of Deception*, p. 321.
- 19 Cooley, *Payback*, p. 76.
- 20 New York Times, 8/30/83.
- 21 Ball, *Error and Betrayal in Lebanon*, pp. 75-77.
- 22 New York Times, 9/5/83.
- 23 Fisk, *Pity the Nation*, pp. 489-91; Friedman, *From Beirut to Jerusalem*, p. 179.
- 24 New York Times, 9/6/83.
- 25 Fisk, *Pity the Nation*, p. 505.
- 26 New York Times, 9/14/83.
- 27 New York Times, 9/13/83.
- 28 Philip Taubman and Joel Brinkley, *New York Times*, 12/11/83. Also see Cockburn, *Dangerous Liaison*, p. 335; Fisk, *Pity the Nation*, p. 505; Friedman, *From Beirut to Jerusalem*, p. 210.
- 29 Friedman, *From Beirut to Jerusalem*, pp. 200-01. Also see Green, *Living by the Sword*, pp. 190-92.
- 30 New York Times, 9/29/83.
- 31 New York Times, 9/25/83; David Koff, "Chronology of the War in Lebanon, Sept.-November, 1983," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Winter 1984, pp. 133-35.
- 32 Philip Taubman and Joel Brinkley, *New York Times*, 12/11/83. Also see Cooley, *Payback*, pp. 80-91; Fisk, *Pity the Nation*, pp. 511-22; Friedman, *From Beirut to Jerusalem*, pp. 201-4; Woodward, *Veil*, pp. 285-87.
- 33 New York Times, 1/4/84; Cooley, *Payback*, pp. 95-97.
- 34 New York Times, 12/4/83.
- 35 New York Times, 1/19/84. Also see New York Times, 1/29/84, and Cooley, *Payback*, p. 75. For a chronology of attacks against Americans in this period, see the *Atlanta Journal*, 1/31/85.
- 36 Fisk, *Pity the Nation*, p. 533.
- 37 New York Times, 4/16/84. Also see Cooley, *Payback*, p. 111; Fisk, *Pity the Nation*, p. 565.
- 38 Cooley, *Payback*, p. 102; Fisk, *Pity the Nation*, p. 533; Friedman, *From Beirut to Jerusalem*, p. 220.

THE ATTACK ON THE USS *LIBERTY* AND ITS COVER-UP

Former Ambassador James Akins delivered this speech at the Center for Policy Analysis on Palestine in September of 1999. It was the second Annual Distinguished Lecture.

I

In 1963, three World War II Victory hull freighters were refitted as technical research ships. Their function, formally, was "to conduct technical research operations in support of U.S. Navy electronic research projects, which include electromagnetic propagation studies and advanced communications systems." *Jane's Fighting Ships* called these vessels "mobile bases for research in communications and electromagnetic radiation.... [They are] considered electronic intelligence ships." They were designed to intercept foreign electronic messages, and they were popularly called "spy ships." One of these ships was re-christened the "USS *Liberty*."

In late May 1967, tension between Egypt and Israel had become serious, and the Navy Department decided that it needed a "spy ship" in the region. As the *Liberty* was in Abidjan at the time and could get to the Mediterranean in two weeks, it was dispatched. On June 5, when Israel attacked Egypt and destroyed most of its air force, the *Liberty* was already in the eastern Mediterranean. Captain William L. McGonagle of the *Liberty* immediately asked Vice Admiral William I. Martin at the Sixth Fleet headquarters to send a destroyer to accompany the *Liberty* and serve as its armed escort and an auxiliary communications center.

The following day, June 6, Admiral Martin replied: "*Liberty* is a clearly

marked United States ship in international waters, not a participant in the conflict and not a reasonable subject for attack by any nation. Request denied." He promised, however, that, in the unlikely event of an inadvertent attack, jet fighters from the Sixth Fleet could be overhead in ten minutes.

By the evening of June 7, the *Liberty* was 13 miles off the coast of Gaza, in international waters. At about that time, the Pentagon decided that the ship might be too exposed and sent a message to the Sixth Fleet headquarters, copied to the *Liberty*, ordering the ship to withdraw to 20 miles from the coast. The message was misdirected to the Philippines, and the *Liberty* never got its copy. The Pentagon then decided that 20 miles was insufficient and ordered the ship to withdraw to 100 miles from the coast. That message, too, was misdirected to the Philippines and was never received by the *Liberty*.

As the ship had not acknowledged receipt of the earlier messages, a direct message was sent to the *Liberty*. Unfortunately, it was classified "top secret," and the ship was unable to receive it. So the *Liberty* proceeded on course to the waters off Gaza.

Notwithstanding the incompetent Navy communicators, the crucial fact was that the ship remained, at all times, in international waters.

At about 09:00 on June 8, a plane approached the ship, but its markings could not be identified; the plane broke off, and then turned toward the Gaza coast. At 10:00, two delta-winged jets flew close enough to the ship to enable officers with binoculars to count the rockets they were carrying and even to see the pilots. But no identifying marks on the planes could be seen.

Still, there was no great concern, as the planes, which circled the ship three times, could easily see its markings and its large American flag. At 10:30, a flying boxcar circled the ship at about 200 feet, slowly giving further assurance that the ship had been identified as American. This time, the plane's Israeli markings were clearly visible. The boxcar repeated this at about 11:00 and again at 11:30.

The ship continued its patrol at very slow speed when, at 14:00, two Mirage aircraft were seen rapidly approaching the ship. Although they were unmarked, they were assumed to be Israeli planes – the Arabs did not have Mirages – and no defensive action was taken (not that it would have done much good, as the ship was only very lightly armed). Both Mirage aircraft attacked the ship. The crew was totally unprepared, and the damage was

supporters today oppose sending U.S. peacekeepers to the Golan Heights as part of a possible Israeli-Syrian peace treaty. A repeat of the 1982-84 experience would certainly not be in Israel's interests at a time when its supporters are seeking to have a budget-conscious Congress continue unprecedented amounts of aid to Israel.

RECOMMENDED READING:

For a list of additional informational booklets on Israel-Palestine available from If Americans Knew, please contact us or visit www.IfAmericansKnew.org.

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| Ball, George, <i>Error and Betrayal in Lebanon</i> , Washington, DC, Foundation for Middle East Peace, 1984. | Report of the International Commission to enquire into reported violations of international law by Israel during its invasion of Lebanon, London, Ithaca Press, 1983. |
| *Cockburn, Andrew and Leslie Cockburn, <i>Dangerous Liaison: The Inside Story of the U.S.-Israeli Covert Relationship</i> , New York, Harper Collins, 1991. | Ostrovsky, Victor and Claire Hoy, <i>By Way of Deception</i> , New York, St. Martin's Press, 1990. |
| Cooley, John K., <i>Payback: America's Long War in the Middle East</i> , New York, Brassey's U.S., Inc., 1991. | Peck, Juliana S., <i>The Reagan Administration and the Palestinian Question: The First Thousand Days</i> , Washington, DC, Institute for Palestine Studies, 1984. |
| *Findley, Paul, <i>Deliberate Deceptions: Facing the Facts About the U.S.-Israeli Relationship</i> , Brooklyn, NY, Lawrence Hill Books, 1993. | *Randal, Jonathan, <i>Going all the Way</i> , New York, The Viking Press, 1983. |
| Fisk, Robert, <i>Pity the Nation: The Abduction of Lebanon</i> , New York, Atheneum, 1990. | Schechla, Joseph, <i>The Iron Fist: Israel's Occupation of South Lebanon, 1982-1985</i> , Washington, D.C.: ADC Research Institute, Issue Paper No. 17, 1985. |
| Frank, Benis M., <i>U.S. Marines in Lebanon: 1982-1984</i> , History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, Washington, DC, 1987. | *Schiff, Ze'ev and Ehud Ya'ari, <i>Israel's Lebanon War</i> , New York, Simon and Schuster, 1984. |
| *Friedman, Thomas L., <i>From Beirut to Jerusalem</i> , New York, Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1989. | Timerman, Jacobo, <i>The Longest War: Israel in Lebanon</i> , New York, Vantage Books, 1982. |
| *Green, Stephen, <i>Living by the Sword</i> , Amana, 1988. | Woodward, Bob, <i>Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA 1981-1987</i> , New York, Simon and Schuster, 1987. |
| *Jansen, Michael, <i>The Battle of Beirut: Why Israel Invaded Lebanon</i> , London, Zed Press, 1982. | |
| MacBride, Sean, <i>Israel in Lebanon: The</i> | * Available through the American Educational Trust (AET) Book Club. |

men around the Beirut airport.³⁴

By the start of 1984, an all-out Shi'i Muslim campaign to rid Lebanon of all Americans was underway. The highly respected president of the American University of Beirut, Dr. Malcolm Kerr, a distinguished scholar of the Arab world, was gunned down on Jan. 18 outside his office by Islamic militants aligned with Iran.³⁵ On Feb. 5, Reagan made one of his stand-tall speeches by saying that "the situation in Lebanon is difficult, frustrating and dangerous. But this is no reason to turn our backs on friends and to cut and run."³⁶

The next day Professor Frank Regier, a U.S. citizen teaching at AUB, was kidnapped by Muslim radicals.³⁷ Regier's kidnapping was the beginning of a series of kidnappings of Americans in Beirut that would hound the Reagan and later the Bush administrations for years and lead to the eventual expulsion of nearly all Americans from Lebanon where they had prospered for more than a century. Even today Americans still are prohibited from traveling to Lebanon.

The day after Regier's kidnapping, on Feb. 7, 1984, Reagan suddenly reversed himself and announced that all U.S. Marines would shortly be "redeployed." The next day the battleship USS New Jersey fired 290 rounds of one-ton shells from its 16-inch guns into Lebanon as a final act of U.S. frustration.³⁸ Reagan's "redeployment" was completed by Feb. 26, when the last of the Marines retreated from Lebanon.

The mission of the Marines had been a humiliating failure—not because they failed in their duty but because the political backbone in Washington was lacking. The Marines had arrived in 1982 with all sides welcoming them. They left in 1984 despised by many and the object of attacks by Muslims. Even relations with Israel were strained, if not in Washington where a sympathetic Congress granted increased aid to the Jewish state to compensate it for the costs of its bungled invasion, then between the Marines and Israeli troops who had confronted each other in a realpolitik battlefield that was beyond their competence or understanding. The Marine experience in Lebanon did not contribute toward a favorable impression of Israel among many Americans, especially since the Marines would not have been in Lebanon except for Israel's unprovoked invasion.

This negative result is perhaps one reason a number of Israelis and their

great.

Captain McGonagle immediately informed the Chief of Naval Operations: "Under attack by unidentified jet aircraft, require immediate assistance." According to James M. Ennes, Jr., who was badly wounded in this first attack, a U.S. submarine that had been following the ship sent up its periscope and filmed the attack. He was told of this by one of the submarine's crew, and, according to Ennes, he subsequently got confirmation from three other persons in position to know the truth. They have never spoken publicly about the matter.

The first attack lasted about five minutes. A few minutes later, three unmarked Super-Mysteres attacked with napalm and dozens of rockets. There was then a short respite, and two more Mirages, also unmarked, attacked. The entire two-part engagement lasted about 22 minutes.

Throughout the attack, the ship tried to contact Sixth Fleet headquarters, but the Israeli planes knew the frequencies of the transmission and were able to block the messages, except when the attacks were underway. During those few seconds, the radio operator, one of the many on board the *Liberty* who performed heroically, was able to make contact with the Sixth Fleet. The first ship to receive and acknowledge the distress signal was the carrier *Saratoga*, which almost immediately dispatched 12 F-4 Phantom jets and four tanker planes to defend the *Liberty*. The Sixth Fleet flagship, the *Little Rock*, which had received the messages at almost the same time, was informed, and the *Liberty* was told that help was on the way.

It never arrived. Very shortly after Washington got word of the attack and of the 12 planes that had been dispatched to support it, Secretary of Defense Robert MacNamara personally got on the radio circuit and said, "Tell [the] Sixth Fleet to get those aircraft back immediately." That message did get through, and the planes were recalled. In subsequent discussion of the affair, the White House directed the Pentagon to say that the Israelis had acknowledged their "mistake," that the attack had been called off, and that the Israelis would give assistance to the ship.

Nine men had been killed and about 60 wounded. But, in spite of what the White House said, that was not the end of the Israeli action. While most of the lifeboats had been destroyed in the first attack, the ship managed to launch three, but they were immediately attacked by Israeli motor torpedo

boats. The Israelis destroyed two of the lifeboats – a war crime in itself – and captured the third. The torpedo boats also fired their cannons into the ship in an apparent last attempt to sink it. The carnage continued until 171 American sailors were wounded, many severely, and 34 were killed.

When the Israelis saw that they were unable to sink the ship after more than two hours of intense attack, they offered support to the survivors. Captain McGonagle, who had been badly wounded himself, refused, and his ship limped into Malta, where 821 rocket and missile holes and more than 3,000 holes from armor piercing bullets were counted. In subsequent “explanations,” the Israelis said they had mistaken the ship for the Egyptian “*al-Qusair*,” although the ships’ profiles had nothing in common: the Egyptian ship displaced 2,000 tons, while the American ship displaced 10,000 tons. The *Liberty* was clearly marked, and it flew a standard American flag that measured five-by-eight feet. The flag was destroyed during the first attack, but it was replaced immediately by a nine-by-15 foot “holiday flag,” which remained aloft throughout the subsequent attacks. The Israelis never attempted to explain how they had acquired the frequencies on which the ship transmitted, and why they had blocked them (the Egyptian frequencies would have been quite different). Nor have they explained why their aircraft were unmarked, or why the American flag was ignored. While in Malta, most of the surviving officers and men were interviewed in several groups by Rear Admiral Isaac Kidd, who ostentatiously took off the stars on his uniform in each case and said, “Now tell me, man-to-man, everything that happened.” They all did. Then, equally ostentatiously, Kidd put the stars back on and said: “Now I’m talking officially; you are never, repeat never, to discuss this with anyone, not even your wives. If you do, you will be court-martialed and will end your lives in prison or worse.” The threats were effective, and, for several years, almost no one spoke out. Ennes was the first to break the wall of silence in his extraordinary book, *Assault on the Liberty*, which was not published until 1979, however, and was generally ignored by the reviewers. Now almost all the survivors who can be contacted speak freely and bitterly. And no one listens.

self-defense for the Marines, including air and naval strikes.²⁷ Five days later the United States essentially joined the war against the Muslims when four U.S. warships unleashed the heaviest naval bombardment since Vietnam into Syrian and Druze positions in eastern Lebanon in support of the Lebanese Christians.²⁸ The bombardment lasted for three days and was personally ordered by National Security Council director Robert McFarlane, a Marine Corps officer detailed to the White House who was in Lebanon at the time and was also a strong supporter of Israel and its Lebanese Maronite Christian allies. McFarlane issued the order despite the fact that the Marine commander at the airport, Colonel Timothy Geraghty, strenuously argued against it because, in the words of correspondent Thomas L. Friedman, “he knew that it would make his soldiers party to what was now clearly an intra-Lebanese fight, and that the Lebanese Muslims would not retaliate against the Navy’s ships at sea but against the Marines on shore.”²⁹

By now, the Marines were under daily attack and Muslims were charging they were no longer neutral.³⁰ At the same time the battleship USS New Jersey, with 16-inch guns, arrived off Lebanon, increasing the number of U.S. warships offshore to 14. Similarly, the Marine contingent at Beirut airport was increased from 1,200 to 1,600.³¹

A Tragic Climax

The fight now was truly joined between the Shi’i Muslims and the Marines, who were essentially pinned down in their airport bunkers and under orders not to take offensive actions. The tragic climax of their predicament came on Oct. 23, when a Muslim guerrilla drove a truck past guards at the Marine airport compound and detonated an explosive with the force of 12,000 pounds of dynamite under a building housing Marines and other U.S. personnel. Almost simultaneously, a car-bomb exploded at the French compound in Beirut. Casualties were 241 Americans and 58 French troops killed. The bombings were the work of Hezbollah, made up of Shi’i Muslim guerrillas supported by Iran.³²

America’s agony increased on Dec. 3, when two carrier planes were downed by Syrian missiles during heavy U.S. air raids on eastern Lebanon.³³ On the same day, eight Marines were killed in fighting with Muslim militia-

under direct fire by rocket-propelled grenades and automatic weapons at International Airport. They returned fire with M-16 rifles and M-60 machine guns. The firefight resumed the next day with Marines firing 155mm artillery, 81mm mortars and rockets from Cobra helicopter gunships against Shi'i Muslim positions. Two Marines were killed and 14 wounded in the exchange, the first casualties in actual combat since the Marines had landed the previous year.²⁰

From this time on, the combat involvement of the Marines grew. Their actions were generally seen as siding with Israel against Muslims, slowly changing the status of the Marines as neutral peacekeepers to opponents of the Muslims.²¹ Israel could hardly have wished for more. The polarization meant that increasingly the conflict was being perceived in terms of the U.S., Israel and Lebanon's Christians against Iran, Islam and Lebanon's Shi'i Muslims.

Accelerating the Conflict

Israel accelerated the building conflict on Sept. 3, 1993 by unilaterally withdrawing its troops southward, leaving the Marines exposed behind their thin lines at the airport. The United States had asked the Israeli government to delay its withdrawal until the Marines could be replaced by units of the Lebanese army, but Israel refused.²² The result was as feared. Heavy fighting immediately broke out between the Christian Lebanese Forces and the pro-Syrian Druze units, both seeking to occupy positions evacuated by Israel, while the Marines were left in the crossfire.²³ On Sept. 5, two Marines were killed and three wounded as fighting escalated between Christian and Muslim militias.²⁴

In an ill-considered effort to subdue the combat, the Sixth Fleet frigate Bowen fired several five-inch naval guns, hitting Druze artillery positions in the Chouf Mountains that were firing into the Marine compound at Beirut airport.²⁵ It was the first time U.S. ships had fired into Lebanon, dramatically raising the level of combat. But the Marines' exposed location on the flat terrain of the airport left them in an impossible position. On Sept. 12, three more Marines were wounded.²⁶

On Sept. 13, President Reagan authorized what was called aggressive

II

George Ball was the most honorable undersecretary of state under Kennedy and Johnson. It is now widely known that he saw clearly what mistakes we made in Vietnam and that he recommended an early withdrawal. What is less well known is that he also believed our policy of underwriting all of Israel's actions in the Middle East to be harmful to America's interests and its foreign policy objectives. This did not endear Ball to the Israeli lobby, and Ball firmly believed, until he died, that he would have been selected secretary of state by Jimmy Carter if his appointment had not been vetoed by the Israelis.

In 1992, Ball wrote his last book, *The Passionate Attachment: America's Involvement with Israel, 1947 to the Present*. The title is a phrase from George Washington's farewell address in 1796. Washington counseled the new nation that, in "shaping its international relations, it should abjure any passionate attachment to, or inveterate hatred of, any other nation. Instead, it should cultivate peace and harmony with all." Washington was clearly referring to the attachment of some of his fellow Americans to France. Ball believed the "passionate attachment" of some Americans to Israel was, and is, equally dangerous. Although Ball was very well-known, and his previous books were widely and favorably reviewed, this book was ignored. *The Washington Post* and the *New York Times* carried reviews by defenders of Israel who used the occasion, not to review the book, but to launch *ad hominem* attacks against Ball. The book was not reviewed elsewhere, and there were no interviews on the daytime talk shows.

In his book, Ball, who was a top State Department official in 1967, wrote:

"The *Liberty's* presence and function were known to Israel's leaders. They presumably thought it vital that the *Liberty* be prevented from informing Washington of their intention to violate any cease-fire before they had completed their occupation of the Golan. Their solution was brutal and direct. . . . Apprised of Israel's plans from various sources, the U.S. Navy Department faced a delicate problem. Due regard for the lives of America's naval personnel should have impelled the Navy to urge the State Department to warn off Israel in no uncertain terms; meanwhile, the Navy should have alerted the *Liberty* to its danger and dispatched ships or planes for its protection. But none of these

actions was taken in time.”

Ball describes the attack and the slaughter of American seamen, and then goes on:

“The sequel was unedifying. The administration tried vigorously to downplay the whole matter. Although it silenced the crew, casualties to the sailors and damage to the ship could not possibly be concealed. Thus, an elaborate charade was performed. The ship, they rejoined, had not been clearly marked but looked like an Arab ship – which was definitely untrue. ... In the end, the Israelis tendered a reluctant and graceless apology. . . . The sordid affair has still not been erased from the history books; an organization of devoted survivors has kept the cause alive over the years by publishing a newsletter and holding well-advertised meetings.”

Is there any possibility that the U.S. government did not know what the Israelis were doing to the *Liberty* or that it thought that there was, in fact, an honest mistake? Senator Jacob Javits of New York said at the time: “Thank heavens the ship was attacked by the Israelis because we know it was a mistake.” The unstated implication was that an attack by an Arab government would have been deliberate. Pace Senator Javits, there was no one at the top of the U.S. government who did not know the facts.

Dwight Porter, who was U.S. ambassador to Lebanon at the time of the Israeli attack on the Golan, told columnist Roland Evans in late 1991 that the CIA station chief showed him, during or immediately after the attack, the transcript of intercepted Israeli messages. Israeli planes had been given the order by the IDF (Israel Defense Forces) to attack the *Liberty*, but a pilot replied that it was an American ship. The order was repeated, but the pilot still insisted that he could see the American flag. He was then told harshly that he had his orders: “Attack it.” And, as we sadly know, he did. These facts were published in the Evans and Novak column of 6 November 1991.

The columnists got further confirmation from an American-born Israeli major, Seth Mintz, who was in the war room in Tel Aviv at the time of the attack. He is quoted as saying: “... everyone felt it was an American ship and that it was the *Liberty* ... there were comments about the markings, about the flag. Everyone in that room was convinced that it was an American ship.” Mintz, on the television program *Evans & Novak*, said that “[t]he Israelis

Commandant Barrow.¹² It was a losing battle for the Israelis and Landsberg soon dropped from sight.

But the incidents did not stop. These now included “helicopter harassment,” by which U.S.-made helicopters with glaring spotlights were flown by the Israelis over Marine positions at night, illuminating Marine outposts and exposing them to potential attack. As reports of these incidents piled up, Gen. Barrow received a letter on March 12 from a U.S. Army major stationed in Lebanon with the United Nations Truce Supervisory Organization (UNTSO). The letter described a systematic pattern of Israeli attacks and provocations against UNTSO troops, including instances in which U.S. officers were singled out for “near-miss” shootings, abuse and detention.¹³ That same day two Marine patrols were challenged and cursed by Israeli soldiers.¹⁴

Two days later Barrow wrote his letter to Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger, who endorsed it and sent it along to the State Department. High-level meetings were arranged and the incidents abated, perhaps largely because by this time Ariel Sharon had been fired as defense minister. He had been found by an Israeli commission to have had “personal responsibility” for the Sabra and Shatila massacres.¹⁵

Despite the bad taste left from the clashes with the Israelis, in fact no Marines had been killed in the incidents and their lines had been secure up to the end of winter in 1983. Then Islamic guerrillas, backed by Iran, became active. On the night of April 17, 1983, an unknown sniper fired a shot that went through the trousers of a Marine sentry but did not harm him. For the first time, the Marines returned fire.¹⁶

The next day, the U.S. Embassy in Beirut was blown up by a massive bomb, with the loss of 63 lives. Among the 17 Americans killed were CIA Mideast specialists, including Robert C. Ames, the agency's top Middle East expert.¹⁷ Disaffected former Israeli Mossad case officer Victor Ostrovsky later claimed that Israel had advance information about the bombing plan but had decided not to inform the United States, a claim denied by Israel.¹⁸ The Iranian-backed Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility. Veteran correspondent John Cooley considered the attack “the day [Iranian leader Ayatollah] Khomeini's offensive against America in Lebanon began in earnest.”¹⁹

Still, it was not until four months later, on Aug. 28, that Marines came

It was at the airport that the Marines would suffer their Calvary over the next year. Starting in January 1983, small Israeli units began probing the Marine lines. At first the effort appeared aimed at discovering the extent of Marine determination to resist penetration. The lines proved solid and the Marines' determination strong. Israeli troops were politely but firmly turned away. Soon the incidents escalated, with both sides pointing loaded weapons at each other but no firing taking place. Tensions were high enough by late January that a special meeting between U.S. and Israeli officers was held in Beirut to try to agree on precise boundaries beyond which the IDF would not penetrate.¹⁰

No Stranger to the Marines

However, on Feb. 2 a unit of three Israeli tanks, led by Israeli Lt. Col. Rafi Landsberg, tried to pass through Marine/Lebanese Army lines at Rayan University Library in south Lebanon. By this time, Landsberg was no stranger to the Marines. Since the beginning of January he had been leading small Israeli units in probes against the Marine lines, although such units would normally have a commander no higher than a sergeant or lieutenant. The suspicion grew that Sharon's troops were deliberately provoking the Marines and Landsberg was there to see that things did not get out of hand. The Israeli tactics were aimed more at forcing a joint U.S.-Israeli strategy than merely probing lines.

In the Feb. 2 incident, the checkpoint was commanded by Marine Capt. Charles Johnson, who firmly refused permission for Landsberg to advance. When two of the Israeli tanks ignored his warning to halt, Johnson leaped on Landsberg's tank with pistol drawn and demanded Landsberg and his tanks withdraw. They did.¹¹

Landsberg and the Israeli embassy in Washington tried to laugh off the incident, implying that Johnson was a trigger-happy John Wayne type and that the media were exaggerating a routine event. Landsberg even went so far as to claim that he smelled alcohol on Johnson's breath and that drunkenness must have clouded his reason. Marines were infuriated because Johnson was well known as a teetotaler. Americans flocked to Johnson's side. He received hundreds of letters from school children, former Marines and from

were guilty of an outrage." The American suppression of the truth is surely an equal outrage. There have also been reports, never confirmed on the record, that at least one of the attacking pilots was an American citizen.

Major Mintz was apparently a dual citizen; at least he was living in Maine at the time he was interviewed on *Evans & Novak*. It is too bad that he did not make his statements earlier, that he had not renounced his Israeli citizenship at the time, and that he had not gone public immediately. But that would be asking a lot – too much, in view of the American government's own efforts to suppress the truth.

Ball is certainly right that the Israelis wanted no interference in their plans to occupy Syria's Golan Heights. The essentials of the Golan problem are well known; they can be described as follows:

"From 1948 until 1967, the Syrians sat on the Golan Heights and shelled the defenseless and peaceful Israeli farmers below. This was done out of maliciousness or a desire to be provocative or perhaps just because the Syrians were evil. Clearly, this situation had become intolerable to the Israelis, and they had not only the right but the duty to change it. And they did; the occupation of the Heights – although there may not have been any specific provocation during the Israeli attacks on Egypt and Jordan – was perfectly understandable and justifiable."

These "facts" were widely, if not universally, understood in the United States. Brent Scowcroft, subsequently head of the National Security Council, responded archly when I suggested that the story was not exactly right: "Everyone knows the facts," he said. "I was just in Israel and I saw for myself what had happened." The problem was – and is – that this Israeli history of the Golan is pure fiction. Every one of the 1,000-odd clashes between Syria and Israel between 1948 and 1967 was examined by the UN supervisory commission, which found that only a very few had clearly been caused by the Syrians. A few dozen were ambiguous, and all the rest were caused by Israel. But, many Israelis insist, the UN was notoriously anti-Israel, so how could its reports be believed? Well, there were many officers of many nations, and they all reported the same things. Could they all have been lying? We no longer have to rely only on UN documentation to confirm the verity of their accounts.

General Moshe Dayan, who commanded the Israeli forces in 1967 and

gave the order to occupy the Golan, gave an interview to an Israeli journalist, Rami Tal, in 1976. The interview was kept secret until April 1997, when it was published in the Israeli newspaper *Yediot Aharonot*. It has been authenticated by Israeli historians, and General Dayan's daughter, Yael, a member of the Knesset, insisted that it be published.

In the interview, Tal interjected, "But they were sitting on the Golan Heights...."

"Never mind that," said Dayan. "I know how at least 80 percent of the clashes there started.... It went this way: We would send a tractor to plow some area where it wasn't possible to do anything – (it was) in the demilitarized zone – and [we] would know in advance that the Syrians would start to shoot. If they didn't shoot, we would tell the tractor to advance further, until, in the end, the Syrians would get annoyed and shoot. And then we would use artillery and later the air force.... And that's how it was."

Dayan thought that the Golan would have to be given back to Syria if there were ever to be peace in the region and that keeping it would result in the loss of many Israeli soldiers.

Then why did he give the order to invade? Essentially, it was because of pressure from the would-be settlers, who convinced Levi Eshkol, the Israeli prime minister, to occupy the Heights and the fertile lands beyond. When asked if that was all there was to it, Dayan replied:

"I can tell you with absolute confidence that (they) were not thinking about (security); they were thinking about the Heights' land.... I saw them; I spoke with them. They didn't even try to hide their greed for that land."

During the peace talks between Syria and Israel that took place while Yitzhak Rabin was prime minister of Israel, there was almost full agreement. Israel would withdraw from all of the Heights; there would be demilitarized zones on both sides of the border – more in Syria than in Israel. Perhaps the only significant unresolved issue was where the final border would be: the international pre-1947 border (the Israeli position) or the 1948 truce line (the Syrian position). A total of less than 15 square miles was at issue.

This encouraging development ended with the murder of Rabin and the subsequent election of Binyamin Netanyahu as prime minister. Netanyahu agreed to talks with Syria, but they had to begin all over again. The Syrians

turned out to be only partly true. They did withdraw on Sept. 10, but a reinforced unit of 1,200 was rushed back 15 days later after the massacres at the Palestinian refugee camps at Sabra and Shatila that accompanied the Israeli seizure of West Beirut. The U.S. forces remained until Feb. 26, 1984.⁴

During their year-and-a-half posting in Lebanon, the Marines suffered 268 killed.⁵ The casualties started within a week of the return of the Marines in September 1982. On the 30th, a U.S.-made cluster bomb left behind by the Israelis exploded, killing Corporal David Reagan and wounding three other Marines.⁶

Corporal Reagan's death represented the dangers of the new mission of the Marines in Lebanon. While their first brief stay had been to separate Israeli forces from Palestinian fighters evacuating West Beirut, their new mission was as part of a multinational force sent to prevent Israeli troops from attacking the Palestinian civilians left defenseless there after the withdrawal of PLO forces. As President Reagan said: "For this multinational force to succeed, it is essential that Israel withdraw from Beirut."⁷

"Incidents are timed, orchestrated, and executed for Israeli political purposes."

Israel's siege of Beirut during the summer of 1982 had been brutal and bloody, reaching a peak of horror on Aug. 12, quickly known as Black Thursday. On that day, Sharon's forces launched at dawn a massive artillery barrage that lasted for 11 straight hours and was accompanied by saturation air bombardment.⁸ As many as 500 persons, mainly Lebanese and Palestinian civilians, were killed.⁹

On top of the bombardment came the massacres the next month at Sabra and Shatila, where Sharon's troops allowed Lebanese Maronite killers to enter the camps filled with defenseless civilians. The massacres sickened the international community and pressure from Western capitals finally forced Israel to withdraw from Beirut in late September. Troops from Britain, France, Italy and the United States were interposed between the Israeli army and Beirut, with U.S. Marines deployed in the most sensitive area south of Beirut at the International Airport, directly between Israeli troops and West Beirut.

ISRAEL CHARGED WITH SYSTEMATIC HARASSMENT OF U.S. MARINES

Donald Neff was Time Magazine's Bureau Chief in Israel.

It was 12 years ago, on March 14, 1983, that the commandant of the Marine Corps sent a highly unusual letter to the secretary of defense expressing frustration and anger at Israel. General R.H. Barrow charged that Israeli troops were deliberately threatening the lives of Marines serving as peacekeepers in Lebanon. There was, he wrote, a systematic pattern of harassment by Israel Defense Forces (IDF) that was resulting in "life-threatening situations, replete with verbal degradation of the officers, their uniform and country."

Barrow's letter added: "It is inconceivable to me why Americans serving in peacekeeping roles must be harassed, endangered by an ally...It is evident to me, and the opinion of the U.S. commanders afloat and ashore, that the incidents between the Marines and the IDF are timed, orchestrated, and executed for obtuse Israeli political purposes."¹

Israel's motives were less obtuse than the diplomatic general pretended. It was widely believed then, and now, that Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon, one of Israel's most Machiavellian politician-generals, was creating the incidents deliberately in an effort to convince Washington that the two forces had to coordinate their actions in order to avoid such tensions. This, of course, would have been taken by the Arabs as proof that the Marines were not really in Lebanon as neutral peacekeepers but as allies of the Israelis, a perception that would have obvious advantages for Israel.²

Barrow's extraordinary letter was indicative of the frustrations and miseries the Marines suffered during their posting to Lebanon starting on Aug. 25, 1982, as a result of Israel's invasion 11 weeks earlier. Initially a U.S. unit of 800 men was sent to Beirut harbor as part of a multinational force to monitor the evacuation of PLO guerrillas from Beirut. The Marines, President Reagan announced, "in no case... would stay longer than 30 days."³ This

said that they wanted the talks to resume, but they would have to proceed from positions already agreed upon.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak resumed talks with the Syrians, but he was apparently not ready to let them proceed from the point reached with Yitzhak Rabin. Nonetheless, Syria, other Arab countries, and all those who are interested in peace in the Middle East have not yet given up hope that Barak will follow internationally accepted forms and traditions and will resume negotiations at the point which the earlier government had reached: full withdrawal from the Golan and demilitarized zones on both sides of the border. The Syrians maintain that Rabin agreed to the 1967 cease-fire line as the final Israeli-Syrian border; Barak maintains that this was only a "draft" proposal, not a firm Israeli commitment. I believe that either side could accept the position of the other without doing damage to its security or prestige, and that a logical compromise would be, more or less, to split the difference.

In his comments on the *Liberty*, Ball concludes:

"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 almost anything."

This is hard to gainsay. In fact, the Israelis tried to press their advantage almost immediately. During the 1967 war, Israel occupied the entire Sinai Peninsula, and among the prizes of its victory were the Egyptian oil fields that they proceeded to exploit to capacity until the Sinai was returned. But the main Egyptian oil fields were off-shore in the Gulf of Suez. The Israelis maintained that the new Israeli-Egyptian border was the median line in the Gulf and that the oil fields were to the east of the line, and therefore under Israeli control.

Then-General Rabin came to Washington very shortly after the war to press the claim. He said that Israel had occupied the drilling platforms during the war (which might have changed the legality of the matter), but, in fact, the general was lying, and we knew it. That did not deter Rabin. He had not come to negotiate; he had come to dictate, and he proceeded to tell

Secretary of State Dean Rusk what “the United States had to do.” He even gave a schedule: this must be done today, this tomorrow, and this by the end of the week. Rusk was a mild Georgian, a gentleman who never lost his temper, never raised his voice. As Rabin ranted, Rusk’s neck turned red, and the red kept rising like a thermometer. When he was completely red, he said, quite coolly:

“General, we have all heard the Soviet propaganda, repeated by [Egyptian] President [Gamai Abdel] Nasser and others, that Israel is an American colony imposed on the Middle East to enable the U.S. to dominate it. We all know that is nonsense. But I would like to remind you that the United States is not a colony of Israel.”

Rabin did not get what he wanted – at least not regarding the Suez oil fields – a minor and a rare defeat.

An even more flagrant example of Israeli certainty that it could do anything against the United States and get away with it was the case of Jonathan Pollard, the spy who did the most damage to America in our entire history, according to Caspar Weinberger, who was secretary of defense at the time of Pollard’s actions. Pollard was a relatively minor official of the Navy Department with a very high security clearance. He was given names and numbers of documents by one or more other Israeli agents in the Defense Department; he then withdrew these documents from the files, took them to an Israeli safe-house where they were copied, and returned them to the files the next day. Literally thousands of documents were taken, most of which had little, if anything, to do with the Middle East.

Israel initially claimed that Pollard’s was a “rogue operation” and that the Israeli government knew nothing about it. Not one member of the American intelligence community believed this, but the U.S. government decided not to make an issue of it. Although this Israeli charade has subsequently been abandoned, no action has ever been taken against Israel; the aid programs have remained intact and relations have remained very friendly. Ball was right; the attack on the *Liberty* proved that the United States would never “draw the line” on Israeli actions.

with him. Finally, I suggested that he contact Admiral Kidd and ask him about the Court of Inquiry.

Shortly after my conversation with Cristol, I received a telephone call from Admiral Kidd, inquiring about Cristol and what he was up to. The Admiral spoke of Cristol in disparaging terms and even opined that “Cristol must be an Israeli agent.” I don’t know if he meant that literally or it was his way of expressing his disgust for Cristol’s highly partisan, pro-Israeli approach to questions involving USS *Liberty*.

At no time did I ever hear Admiral Kidd speak of Cristol other than in highly disparaging terms. I find Cristol’s claims of a “close friendship” with Admiral Kidd to be utterly incredible. I also find it impossible to believe the statements he attributes to Admiral Kidd, concerning the attack on USS *Liberty*.

Several years later, I received a letter from Cristol that contained what he purported to be his notes of our prior conversation. These “notes” were grossly incorrect and bore no resemblance in reality to that discussion. I find it hard to believe that these “notes” were the product of a mistake, rather than an attempt to deceive. I informed Cristol that I disagreed with his recollection of our conversation and that he was wrong. Cristol made several attempts to arrange for the two of us to meet in person and talk but I always found ways to avoid doing this. I did not wish to meet with Cristol as we had nothing in common and I did not trust him.

Contrary to the misinformation presented by Cristol and others, it is important for the American people to know that it is clear that Israel is responsible for deliberately attacking an American ship and murdering American sailors, whose bereaved shipmates have lived with this egregious conclusion for many years.

Dated: January 9, 2004
at Coronado, California.

Ward Boston, Jr., Captain, JAGC, USN (Ret.)
Senior Counsel to the USS *Liberty* Court of Inquiry

I know from personal conversations I had with Admiral Kidd that President Lyndon Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara ordered him to conclude that the attack was a case of “mistaken identity” despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

Admiral Kidd told me, after returning from Washington, D.C. that he had been ordered to sit down with two civilians from either the White House or the Defense Department, and rewrite portions of the court’s findings.

Admiral Kidd also told me that he had been ordered to “put the lid” on everything having to do with the attack on USS *Liberty*. We were never to speak of it and we were to caution everyone else involved that they could never speak of it again.

I have no reason to doubt the accuracy of that statement as I know that the Court of Inquiry transcript that has been released to the public is not the same one that I certified and sent off to Washington.

I know this because it was necessary, due to the exigencies of time, to hand correct and initial a substantial number of pages. I have examined the released version of the transcript and I did not see any pages that bore my hand corrections and initials. Also, the original did not have any deliberately blank pages, as the released version does. Finally, the testimony of Lt. Painter concerning the deliberate machine gunning of the life rafts by the Israeli torpedo boat crews, which I distinctly recall being given at the Court of Inquiry and included in the original transcript, is now missing and has been excised.

Following the conclusion of the Court of Inquiry, Admiral Kidd and I remained in contact. Though we never spoke of the attack in public, we did discuss it between ourselves, on occasion. Every time we discussed the attack, Admiral Kidd was adamant that it was a deliberate, planned attack on an American ship.

In 1990, I received a telephone call from Jay Cristol, who wanted to interview me concerning the functioning of the Court of Inquiry. I told him that I would not speak to him on that subject and prepared to hang up the telephone. Cristol then began asking me about my personal background and other, non-Court of Inquiry related matters. I endeavored to answer these questions and politely extricate myself from the conversation. Cristol continued to return to the subject of the Court of Inquiry, which I refused to discuss

III

Finally, let us face the crucial questions we would all like answered about the *Liberty* incident.

(1) Who knew about the attack on the *Liberty* and when did they know it? The attack was reported by the ship immediately, and the word was certainly on the president’s desk within 15 minutes – probably much less. So he knew. So did Walt Rostow and MacGeorge Bundy in the White House. So did Robert MacNamara, the secretary of defense. So did a number of senior military men. Admiral Thomas Moorer, who was not immediately involved, knows men who were, and he has spoken strongly about the scandal of the Israeli action and the greater scandal of the American non-response.

(2) Planes were dispatched from the mid-Mediterranean to the *Liberty* almost immediately after the attack. Why were they ordered to stop and turn around while the ship was under ferocious attack, and who issued the order? If the planes had continued, they almost certainly could have saved the 25 who were killed and the 110 who were wounded in the second and third Israeli attacks.

(3) Why did Admiral Isaac Kidd threaten *Liberty* crew members with “court martial, prison, or worse” if they talked about the Israeli attack? Did he do this on his own? Or was he ordered to do so and, if so, by whom?

(4) Why has there never been a full Congressional investigation of this whole affair, one of the most shameful in American history? The short answer is simple: All those who know the facts or could find them out are afraid to speak about the matter or to order the investigation. This includes both the Congress and the White House. In Washington, when anyone refers to “The Lobby,” there is no doubt which one is meant: it is AIPAC, the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee. The National Rifle Association (NRA), the powerful gun lobby, is not even comparable.

The American people know so little about the *Liberty* that there has never been a strong demand for answers and for punishment, or at least exposure of those who are responsible. New efforts are being made to reopen the shameful case of the *Liberty*, to try to raise popular consciousness enough to demand a Congressional investigation of the whole matter while there is still some chance that those responsible for the action and the cover-up can

be held accountable. It is late; many of those involved are dead. Those on the ship, who had been frightened into silence, are now speaking out. Even if they are successful – and I fear they will not be – Israel and its supporters in Congress can be expected to try to ignore anything that comes out, any statements that are made, any pleas for justice. This approach has been remarkably successful since 1967.

A major American tragedy has been distorted, and there has been a major cover-up. All the guilty parties have to do is to hold on just a little longer; in a few years, those who remember and who demand justice will all be dead. We can take some small, cold comfort in the certainty that historians will describe the events completely and accurately. They will know whether it was President Lyndon B. Johnson himself or one of his assistants who gave the shameful order to the war planes to abort their rescue efforts. They will know why the Israelis took the action. Was it because they wanted the ship to be sunk before it could monitor the Israeli advance into the Golan Heights? Or was it because the Israelis had ordered us to stay out of the eastern Mediterranean, and the *Liberty* had disobeyed this order – knowingly or not – and therefore had to be destroyed?

Historians will learn the roles of Walt Rostow and Robert MacNamara in the cover-up. They will learn whether Admiral Kidd was acting on his own or on orders to silence, forever, the *Liberty* survivors. They will find out how many American citizens inside Israel knew of or participated in this action against America. They will even learn if any of the pilots who attacked the American ship were carrying American passports.

Yes, the truth will be known and widely accepted someday, and that will be good. How much better it would be if Congress would launch a determined effort to reveal the truth now, if it would call to account those in Israel and the United States who were involved in spreading the lies about the tragedy. The heroes who demand justice have a right to see it done in their lifetimes. And is it too much to ask that those who participated in the attack and its cover-up be exposed, if not punished, while they are still alive?

amount of evidence, including hours of heartbreaking testimony from the young survivors.

The evidence was clear. Both Admiral Kidd and I believed with certainty that this attack, which killed 34 American sailors and injured 172 others, was a deliberate effort to sink an American ship and murder its entire crew. Each evening, after hearing testimony all day, we often spoke our private thoughts concerning what we had seen and heard. I recall Admiral Kidd repeatedly referring to the Israeli forces responsible for the attack as “murderous bastards.” It was our shared belief, based on the documentary evidence and testimony we received first hand, that the Israeli attack was planned and deliberate, and could not possibly have been an accident.

I am certain that the Israeli pilots that undertook the attack, as well as their superiors, who had ordered the attack, were well aware that the ship was American.

I saw the flag, which had visibly identified the ship as American, riddled with bullet holes, and heard testimony that made it clear that the Israelis intended there be no survivors. 10. Not only did the Israelis attack the ship with napalm, gunfire, and missiles, Israeli torpedo boats machine-gunned three lifeboats that had been launched in an attempt by the crew to save the most seriously wounded – a war crime.

Admiral Kidd and I both felt it necessary to travel to Israel to interview the Israelis who took part in the attack. Admiral Kidd telephoned Admiral McCain to discuss making arrangements. Admiral Kidd later told me that Admiral McCain was adamant that we were not to travel to Israel or contact the Israelis concerning this matter.

Regrettably, we did not receive into evidence and the Court did not consider any of the more than sixty witness declarations from men who had been hospitalized and were unable to testify in person.

I am outraged at the efforts of the apologists for Israel in this country to claim that this attack was a case of “mistaken identity.”

In particular, the recent publication of Jay Cristol’s book, *The Liberty Incident*, twists the facts and misrepresents the views of those of us who investigated the attack.

It is Cristol’s insidious attempt to whitewash the facts that has pushed me to speak out.

DECLARATION OF WARD BOSTON, JR.,

Captain, JAGC, USN (Ret.)

Counsel to the U.S. Navy Court of Inquiry's
investigation into the Israeli attack on the USS *Liberty*

I, Ward Boston, Jr. do declare that the following statement is true and complete:

For more than 30 years, I have remained silent on the topic of USS *Liberty*. I am a military man and when orders come in from the Secretary of Defense and President of the United States, I follow them.

However, recent attempts to rewrite history compel me to share the truth.

In June of 1967, while serving as a Captain in the Judge Advocate General Corps, Department of the Navy, I was assigned as senior legal counsel for the Navy's Court of Inquiry into the brutal attack on USS *Liberty*, which had occurred on June 8th.

The late Admiral Isaac C. Kidd, president of the Court, and I were given only one week to gather evidence for the Navy's official investigation into the attack, despite the fact that we both had estimated that a proper Court of Inquiry into an attack of this magnitude would take at least six months to conduct.

Admiral John S. McCain, Jr., then Commander-in-chief, Naval Forces Europe (CINCUSNAVEUR), at his headquarters in London, had charged Admiral Kidd (in a letter dated June 10, 1967) to "inquire into all the pertinent facts and circumstances leading to and connected with the armed attack; damage resulting therefrom; and deaths of and injuries to Naval personnel."

Despite the short amount of time we were given, we gathered a vast

A FAIR PROBE WOULD ATTACK *LIBERTY* MISINFORMATION

Admiral Moorer was chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 1970 to 1974 and once was 7th Fleet commander. He was joined in the Independent Commission of Inquiry by Rear Adm. Merlin Staring, former judge advocate general of the Navy; and Ambassador James Akins, former U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia. Gen. Ray Davis, former assistant commandant of the Marine Corps, was a member of the commission at the time of his death in September. This article was published in the Stars and Stripes on January 15, 2004. He passed away only a few weeks later on the 5th of February.

BETHESDA, Md.—While state department officials and historians converge on Washington this week to discuss the 1967 war in the Middle East, I am compelled to speak out about one of U.S. history's most shocking cover-ups.

On June 8, 1967, Israel attacked our proud naval ship – the USS *Liberty* – killing 34 American servicemen and wounding 172. Those men were then betrayed and left to die by our own government.

U.S. military rescue aircraft were recalled – not once, but twice – through direct intervention by the Johnson administration. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's cancellation of the Navy's attempt to rescue the *Liberty*, which I confirmed from the commanders of the aircraft carriers *America* and *Saratoga*, was the most disgraceful act I witnessed in my entire military career.

To add insult to injury, Congress, to this day, has failed to hold formal hearings on Israel's attack on this American ship. No official investigation of

the attack has ever permitted the testimony of the surviving crewmembers.

A 1967 investigation by the Navy, upon which all other reports are based, has now been fully discredited as a cover-up by its senior attorney. Capt. Ward Boston, in a sworn affidavit, recently revealed that the court was ordered by the White House to cover up the incident and find that Israel's attack was "a case of mistaken identity."

Some distinguished colleagues and I formed an independent commission to investigate the attack on the USS *Liberty*. After an exhaustive review of previous reports, naval and other military records, including eyewitness testimony from survivors, we recently presented our findings on Capitol Hill. They include:

Israeli reconnaissance aircraft closely studied the *Liberty* during an eight-hour period prior to the attack, one flying within 200 feet of the ship. Weather reports confirm the day was clear with unlimited visibility. The *Liberty* was a clearly marked American ship in international waters, flying an American flag and carrying large U.S. Navy hull letters and numbers on its bow.

Despite claims by Israeli intelligence that they confused the *Liberty* with a small Egyptian transport, the *Liberty* was conspicuously different from any vessel in the Egyptian navy. It was the most sophisticated intelligence ship in the world in 1967. With its massive radio antennae, including a large satellite dish, it looked like a large lobster and was one of the most easily identifiable ships afloat.

Israel attempted to prevent the *Liberty's* radio operators from sending a call for help by jamming American emergency radio channels.

Israeli torpedo boats machine-gunned lifeboats at close range that had been lowered to rescue the most-seriously wounded. As a result, our commission concluded that:

There is compelling evidence that Israel's attack was a deliberate attempt to destroy an American ship and kill her entire crew.

In attacking the USS *Liberty*, Israel committed acts of murder against U.S. servicemen and an act of war against the United States.

The White House knowingly covered up the facts of this attack from the American people.

The truth continues to be concealed to the present day in what can only be termed a national disgrace.

What was Israel's motive in launching this attack? Congress must address this question with full cooperation from the National Security Agency, the CIA and the military intelligence services.

The men of the USS *Liberty* represented the United States. They were attacked for two hours, causing 70 percent American casualties and the eventual loss of our best intelligence ship.

These sailors and Marines were entitled to our best defense. We gave them no defense. Did our government put Israel's interests ahead of our own? If so, why? Does our government continue to subordinate American interests to Israeli interests? These are important questions that should be investigated by an independent, fully empowered

commission of the American government.

The American people deserve to know the truth about this attack. We must finally shed some light on one of the blackest pages in American naval history. It is a duty we owe not only to the brave men of the USS *Liberty*, but to every man and woman who is asked to wear the uniform of the United States.

A major American tragedy has been distorted, and there has been a major cover-up. All the guilty parties have to do is to hold on just a little longer; in a few years, those who remember and who demand justice will all be dead.