



# The Six Day War:

its legacy for  
international aviation

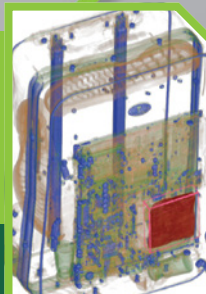
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# THE SIX DAY WAR: ITS LEGACY FOR INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AVIATION

by Philip Baum

This month marks the 50th anniversary of the Six Day War. The conflict started on 5 June 1967 when, following Egypt's mobilisation of troops along its border with Israel, the Israeli Air Force launched a devastating strike on Egyptian forces and all but destroyed the Egyptian Air Force in the process. Jordan and Syria then also attacked the fledgling Israeli state, believing that Egypt's war to the south would enable them to succeed in their military actions to the north and east. By 10 June, the war was over. Egypt had withdrawn from the Sinai and Gaza Strip, Jordan had lost control of the West Bank and, in doing so, East Jerusalem, and Syria had been forced out of the Golan Heights. Whilst that war was over and Israel, far from being wiped out, now controlled far greater swathes of land than they had done a week earlier, peace was not achieved...and nor has it been half a century later.

Whilst the conflict was humiliating for the Arab states, it was regarded as a disaster for the Palestinian people, many of whom lived in refugee camps in the Gaza Strip and West Bank and had done so since 1948 when the modern Israel state first came into being. Far from seeing their aspirations of statehood, and the destruction of Israel, being realised, many now found themselves living under Israeli occupation.

The failure of the Arab states to defeat Israel militarily led to division in the Palestinian ranks with many believing that if conventional warfare was not successful, an alternative route needed to be taken – one which would highlight the plight of the Palestinian people to the rest of the world. Statehood, which the Palestinians could have had in 1948 had they accepted the Partition Plan (whereby there would have been two independent states living side-by-side), could only seemingly be achieved through armed revolution. The late 1960s and early 1970s were the heyday of such activity, and not only for the Palestinian cause...

In the United States, the Black Panthers opted for a more aggressive approach in the campaign for black civil rights and, as a result, actively engaged in the hijacking of aircraft to Cuba, South America and even to North African states, such as Algeria. In Europe, groups such as the Rote Armee Fraktion were emerging in response to perceived Western imperialist actions around the globe, and they forged links with Palestinian groups who were able to support their efforts and later become their hijack partners. It seems

little has changed; disillusioned European youth still head to the Middle East to be trained in 'revolutionary' tactics and return home to inflict callous acts of terrorism on innocent individuals going about their daily lives.

Many regard the events of 23 July 1968 as the first ever terrorist hijacking of an aircraft; earlier Black Panther operations seem not to have qualified as 'terrorism'. The target was an El Al flight en route from London, via Rome, to Tel Aviv. The perpetrators were three

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members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and the orchestrator was Dr George Habash who argued that the Palestinians needed to adopt a style of warfare similar to that which had been used by Jewish paramilitary groups prior to the establishment of the Israeli state. He was impressed by the likes of the Irgun and Lehi as they had, he believed, forced Britain and the world to bring about the creation of Israel. The world could now do the same for the Palestinians. The hijacked airliner was flown to Algiers and there many of the hostages remained for 39 days whilst negotiations took place.

As has been well documented, the Israeli response, in respect of aviation security, was to introduce three measures not widely entertained by the rest of the world – the deployment of sky marshals on all flights, the introduction of passenger profiling prior to passenger boarding and the development of a double-door to protect flight crews in the cockpit. The processes have served the Israeli state, and its aviation industry, well. Since 1968, no Israeli airliner has been successfully hijacked or bombed. That doesn't mean that they have not had a few lucky escapes. The profiling system has not always been successful (indeed, the very deployment of sky marshals is indicative of the fact that profiling is simply a layer of the system, not an infallible solution on its own); on 28 July 1971 a Dutch woman, and 1 September 1971 a Peruvian woman, were both duped into carrying bombs onto El Al flights – bombs which, having failed to detonate as planned, were not discovered until the women reached Israel. A year later, on 16 August 1972, a bomb did detonate on board an El Al flight en route from Rome to Tel Aviv, but the aircraft was not destroyed.

With El Al's security being seemingly impenetrable, Palestinian groups started to target Israel's prime sponsor – the United States – and its aircraft operating in the European arena. And it is against this backdrop that the world had gradually built its aviation security system. It has been reasonably successful; hijackings are now a rarity rather than commonplace.

Aviation is, however, still a target, albeit not primarily by Palestinian groups. Whilst the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains unsolved it has not been a factor in any of the recent attacks; achieving peace between Israel and Palestine will not prevent the like of ISIS or al-Qaeda continuing their actions. Their ideology demands that their activists pursue a far more callous agenda than that of the likes of the PFLP or Abu Nidal Organisation. As we enter our 50th year of trying to prevent terrorist attacks against aviation, we must continue to innovate, educate and create ever-more intuitive and differentiative approaches – and I'm not convinced that banning personal electronic devices on aircraft is a particularly clever way to start. ■

