

# About 15 Americans On Planes

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In a day of top-level meetings at the White House and State Department, the United States yesterday intensified its efforts to work out the safe release of hijacked airline passengers held captive in Jordan by a radical Palestinian guerrilla group.

The State Department estimated at midday that about 80 Americans were among the passengers taken to two Amman hotels, but that perhaps 15 or more were aboard the two planes under heavy guard at a guerrilla-held desert airstrip.

But beyond this direct concern, the round of crisis meetings reflected Washington's nervousness that the publicity coup scored by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) could set off a chain reaction that would doom the already gravely endangered American-sponsored Mideast peace effort.

The last announced crisis meeting of the day was at the White House, where President Nixon convened all of his chief national and internal security advisers for an hour and 15 minutes to review the developments in the hijackings and "to talk about what can be done in the future to prevent hijackings," as Press Secretary Ronald L. Ziegler put it.

Taking part in the meeting were Secretary of State William P. Rogers, Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird, Attorney General John N. Mitchell, Central Intelligence Agency Director Richard M. Helms, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, White House national security adviser Henry A. Kissinger and Assistant Secretary of State Joseph J. Sisco.

Except for Mitchell and Hoover, all the participants had met for an hour in Rogers' office early in the day. Laird's presence at both meetings led to speculation, firmly denied by government spokesmen, that American military action

to rescue the hostages was under consideration.

Defense officials denied reports from abroad that any U.S. troops had been placed on alert. Laird, they said, had ordered the Joint Chiefs of Staff to prepare contingency plans over the weekend. But officials at both State and Defense stressed the extremely high odds against any effort to force hostages' release.

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# U.S. Intensifies Efforts To Free the Hostages

## DIPLOMACY, From A1

The diplomatic effort appeared to be focused at first on preventing any split in the responses of Western nations to the PFLP demands. This was achieved early yesterday when Switzerland reversed its previous announcement that it would free three jailed Palestinian terrorists, which the PFLP had demanded in exchange for release of the hijacked Swissair plane and captured Swiss citizens.

In mid-afternoon, Rogers called in the chief of the 10 Arab diplomatic missions here to appeal for their governments' help on humanitarian grounds. Kuwait's Ambassador Talat al-Ghoussein, speaking for the group after the half-hour meeting, said they had agreed to convey the U.S. concern to their governments.

The Kuwaiti envoy stressed, and State Department officials confirmed, that Rogers was not holding their governments responsible for the hijackings, which al-Ghoussein said he personally thought did not serve the Palestinian cause.

### 'Out of Desperation'

"These actions are out of desperation," the ambassador told reporters. "They have come about because of the desperate situation that these people have been living in. . . We perhaps can understand why they have done it without condoning it."

The Arab diplomats, who included the ambassadors or representatives of Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon,

Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, the Sudan and Algeria, had agreed to "try to contact them (the guerrillas) and talk to them and hope they will listen to us," al-Ghoussein said.

The United States has no official diplomatic contact with the Palestinian guerrilla groups. In the past year, Rogers and Sisco have made a point of referring to American sympathy for the displaced Palestinians in hopes of reducing support for the guerrilla groups, especially radicals like the PFLP.

At the same time, the rising seriousness of international political hijackings has caused the United States to seek world measures to thwart or punish the kidnapers. President Nixon referred to these in his speech to the U.N. General Assembly last fall, and Washington has continued to press for international action bilaterally and in meetings of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

### Treaties Revised

A series of bilateral extradition treaties has been revised to include the principle that hijackers cannot claim the right of political asylum to bar their return to the country where the offense occurred.

An effort to write this same principle into an international convention has run into objections, but an ICAO meeting in The Hague in December is to work out a draft that would require participating countries to agree to return hijackers on demand or take their own legal action against them.