

See also RPK (b) 2 Mar 73; among the guerrillas' demands had been the release of Sirhan.

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A Coded Sentence --Diplomats Died

By Jim Hoagland
Washington Post Service

Khartoum

A two-word coded death sentence resulted in the murders of the American ambassador to the Sudan, his chief deputy and a Belgian diplomat by Black September Palestinian guerrillas last week.

The code words that brought death to the Western diplomats were "Cold River."

One of the two Arab diplomats held hostage by Black September in Khartoum says that the guerrillas' mood toward their hostages changed radically after they received the message on the night of March 2, apparently on a radio link they established with someone outside the Sudan.

The guerrillas reportedly mentioned President Nixon's message of that night — in which he said the U.S. would not give in to the terrorists' "blackmail" — in saying they had to kill the Americans.

The "Cold River" message was given at about the same time to the Sudanese Embassy in Beirut, Lebanon, to be transmitted to the guerrillas in Khartoum, an investigation by the Washington Post into the murders has disclosed.

CODE

The choice of the code and the fact that one version of it was transmitted from Beirut provide a valuable new indication about the operation's possible revenge motive and the location of senior Black September operatives.

Cold River is the name of a Palestinian refugee camp in northern Lebanon that was raided by Israeli troops one week before the killing in Khartoum of American diplomats Cleo A. Noel and G. Curtis Moore, and Belgian Charge d'Affaires Guy Eid.

The existence of the message is also important because it leaves open the possibility that the guerrillas inside the Saudi Embassy did not intend to kill the hos-

tages from the beginning.

The American Embassy here, apparently reacting to suggestions that a toughly worded message by President Nixon may have had an effect on the decision to kill the diplomats, has insisted that there was never any chance of getting the diplomats out alive.

But Saudi Arabian Ambassador Abdullah al Malhoug, and Jordan's charge d'affaires, Adli al Nasser, have told Sudanese authorities that the mood of the guerrillas changed suddenly one hour before the murders — shortly after Mr. Nixon's message.

The first complete account of the tense and eventually tragic 59-hour siege of the Saudi Arabian Embassy, as pieced together from Sudanese and other Arab sources, and Western diplomats directly involved, also discloses:

- All eight of the Black September guerrillas appear to have taken part in the slaughter of Noel, Moore and Eid. Each man was told by the leader of the operation to repeatedly pump bullets into the three men.

- There was almost no security provided for the diplomatic reception where the diplomats were seized. An official dinner for Ethiopia's Emperor Haile Selassie was due to begin within an hour after the end of the reception, and Sudanese security forces were in position there. This may have been a factor in the timing of the raid.

- Eid, the Belgian, may have been taken only because he was wounded in the initial burst of firing and could not escape as did many other diplomats.

- The three condemned men were not brutalized before they were led away to be slain, according to the Saudi and the Jordanian. Moore was struck on the right cheek with a revolver when he was first captured, but was treated correctly after that, until the "Cold River" message arrived. —