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U. S. Thanks Cubans for Skyjack Help

WASHINGTON — (UPI) — The State Department today thanked Cuba for its cooperation in dealing with the crew and passengers of the hijacked Southern Airways jet airliner forced to land at Havana.

Press officer John King, asked whether this cooperation represented an improvement in relations between Washington and Havana, replied it was "hard to say."

He noted that in this case the airliner had been crippled when its tires were riddled by gunfire as it took off from Orlando, Fla., Saturday night. Contrary to previous hijackings to Cuba, he said, there was "real danger to the lives of all concerned."

King said Secretary of State William Rogers spoke this morning with the general manager of Southern Airways, Graydon Hall, whose representatives were in touch with the Cubans during the hijacking.

Hall told Rogers that Cuban officials were cooperative in preparing for an emergency landing, cordial to the passengers and crew and cooperative in permitting Southern to bring back the passengers and crew, and repair the hijacked airliner.