

THE SEIZURE OF THE SAUDI ARABIAN
EMBASSY IN KHARTOUM

Summary

In the early evening hours of 1 March 1973, eight Black September Organization (BSO) terrorists seized the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Khartoum as a diplomatic reception honoring the departing United States Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) was ending. After slightly wounding the United States Ambassador and the Belgian Charge d'Affaires, the terrorists took these officials plus the United States DCM, the Saudi Arabian Ambassador and the Jordanian Charge d'Affaires hostage. In return for the freedom of the hostages, the captors demanded the release of various individuals, mostly Palestinian guerrillas, imprisoned in Jordan, Israel and the United States.

The Khartoum operation was planned and carried out with the full knowledge and personal approval of Yasir Arafat, Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and the head of Fatah. Fatah representatives based in Khartoum participated in the attack, using a Fatah vehicle to transport the terrorists to the Saudi Arabian Embassy.

Initially, the main objective of the attack appeared to be to secure the release of Fatah/BSO leader Muhammed Awadh (Abu Da'ud) from Jordanian captivity. Information acquired subsequently reveals that the Fatah/BSO leaders did not expect Awadh to be freed, and indicates that one of the primary goals of the operation was to strike at the United States because of its efforts to achieve a Middle East peace settlement which many Arabs believe would be inimical to Palestinian interests.

Negotiations with the BSO terrorist team were conducted primarily by the Sudanese Ministers of Interior and of Health. No effort was spared, within the capabilities of the Sudanese Government, to secure the freedom of the hostages. The terrorists extended their deadlines three times, but when they became convinced that their demands would not be met and after they reportedly had received orders from Fatah headquarters in Beirut, they killed the two United States officials and the Belgian Charge. Thirty-four hours later, upon receipt of orders from Yasir Arafat in Beirut to surrender, the

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terrorists released their other hostages unharmed and surrendered to Sudanese authorities.

The Khartoum operation again demonstrated the ability of the BSO to strike where least expected. The open participation of Fatah representatives in Khartoum in the attack provides further evidence of the Fatah/BSO relationship. The emergence of the United States as a primary fedayeen target indicates a serious threat of further incidents similar to that which occurred in Khartoum.

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