



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on March 16, 2018

“7 Days in Entebbe” — The Movie

The daring 1976 Israeli commando raid at the Entebbe, Uganda airport inspired the 1977 movie *Operation Thunderbolt*, and now director Jose Padhila and screenwriter Gregory Burke have given us a second cinematic version. The first version was certainly more favorable to the Israeli heroism that claimed the life of Lt. Colonel Yonatan Netanyahu (causing his brother, Benjamin Netanyahu to enter politics, eventually becoming prime minister).



In this movie, while the Israeli commandos are certainly portrayed as heroic (how could that not be?), the final message is much more mixed.

For example, much of the film is presented from the point of view of two of the terrorists — Brigitte Kuhlmann and Wifried Bose. Both are members of the notorious Baader-Meinhof gang that terrorized Germany from 1970 until the late 1990s, and they spout pro-Palestinian terrorist rhetoric while also ensuring the hostages that they are not Nazis. They do speak favorably of socialism, even remarking that the Arabs are a “socialist” people. But the moviegoer is left in the dark that the Baader-Meinhof gang was also known as the Red Army Faction, that it committed multiple bombings, assassinations, and bank robberies, and that it had been founded by Ulrike Meinhof, who had a long history of support for the Communist Party. In the movie, these German leftists are critical to the success of the hijacking of an Air France plane heading from Tel Aviv to Paris.

The movie begins with a little background information, informing the audience that the Palestinians are fighting for the “return of their land.” Of course, the Israeli position on the founding of the state of Israel and the Arabs in Palestine is very different.

The hijacking took place on June 27, 1976, with the intention of forcing the Israeli government to release some Islamic terrorists before the Israeli hostages would be returned. The movie then shifts the scene to Israel, where Prime Minister Yitzakh Rabin is leading a cabinet meeting, arguing with Defense Minister Shimon Peres over the proper balance between social spending and defense spending. With a touch of irony, Peres is arguing that more money is needed for anti-terrorist training, just as a note is delivered to Rabin about the hijacking.

The plane first touched down in Libya, but although strongman Muommar Khadafy allows the plane to be refueled, he is said not to be very desirous of raising the ire of the Israelis by letting the hijackers and hostages remain in his country. Because of this, the plane makes its way to the African nation of Uganda, where the barbarous dictator Idi Amin is in power. Amin “welcomes” the hostages to the Entebbe Airport, and assures them that if the Israeli government will only negotiate with the terrorists, they would soon be freed.

France had sold planes to Israel, and that is the apparent “justification” for capturing a French civilian airliner. The Arab terrorists tell the hostages that Israel is a fascist, racist, and Zionist state, which they claim was the logical successor to the Nazi movement.



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On the third day of captivity, the Israeli government receives ominous information. The terrorists had separated the Israeli citizens from the other hostages, eventually releasing most of the non-Israeli captives. Defense Minister Peres tells Prime Minister Rabin that they need to conduct a raid to free the hostages. Rabin thinks the plan would fail and the hostages would be killed. Besides that, he is afraid of the repercussions of invading an African country.

Because of this, Peres asks Amin for help in securing the hostages' release, but Amin refuses to do so, urging Israeli officials to instead negotiate with the terrorists. Of course, this is counter to official Israeli policy, as they fear such negotiations would only lead to more terrorism.

When Rabin continues to hesitate to approve a commando raid, Peres tells him, "They are selecting Jews and you want to negotiate." The word "holocaust" is never stated, but the implication is clear to anyone with a minimal knowledge of history.

Finally, Rabin puts it to a vote of the Israeli Cabinet, which unanimously approves of the risky plan. The major concern is that the terrorists would resort to killing the hostages as the commandos hit the airport. As the raid gets underway, Peres tells Rabin that no matter how it turns out, they are doing the right thing. Of course, it turns out well as over 100 hostages are rescued safely, while only four are killed.

For some reason, a girlfriend of one of the commandoes is shown repeatedly at a dance rehearsal for the Batsheva Dance Company, as if that had something to do with the famous raid. It is given at least as much time in the movie as the raid itself. Padilha told *The Jerusalem Post* that he wanted to make a comment "in a cinematic and visual way" about the need to break free of the preconceptions that stopped the Israelis from negotiating with the terrorists. While I did not "get that" from all the dancing, it is clear to me that the director and the screenwriter both wanted to portray the terrorists in a more sympathetic light and downplay the position of the Israelis.

To be fair to the movie's overall portrayal of the hijacking and subsequent rescue, the Israelis are not shown as the "bad guys" so much as the terrorists are given a more human face. Shockingly, even cannibal Idi Amin is given a "kinder and gentler" image. But on a positive note, a Catholic nun, one of the non-Israeli hostages to be released, selflessly pleaded with Amin to allow her to take the place of one of the Jewish hostages, as she feared they were going to be murdered.

Despite some flaws, the movie is worth seeing.

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