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FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

PROGRAM The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour STATION WETA-TV
PBS Network

DATE July 1, 1985 7:00 P.M. CITY Washington, D.C.

SUBJECT Secretary of State, George Shultz Interview

JIM LEHRER: Thirty-nine Americans are free after 17 days as hostages in Beirut. They are now in West Germany and should be back in the United States tomorrow. Everyone claims there was no deal, but today, 24 hours after the Americans were released, the Israeli Cabinet agreed to set free 300 of the 732 Lebanese the TWA hijackers wanted released. Also today, the United States announced it will move immediately to close down Beirut International Airport to make it off limit to terrorists.

We talk about all of this now in a newsmaker interview with the U.S. official most in charge of resolving the situation, the Secretary of State, George Shultz.

Mr. Secretary, welcome.

SECRETARY OF STATE GEORGE SHULTZ: Thank you.

LEHRER: First the action against the Beirut International Airport. Spell out what the purpose of that is, please, sir.

SECRETARY SHULTZ: Well, the purpose is to place off limits, internationally, that airport until the people of Beirut put terrorists off limits. That airport has become a kind of safe haven, as a result of the way in which it has received planes and received the hijackers. And so we want to place it off limits.

LEHRER: Well now, what would they have to do to make it off limits to terrorists?

SECRETARY SHULTZ: Well, first of all, they have to show

us that they'll find the people who committed these acts, hijacked the plane and murdered Robert Stethem and held those people hostage, and do something about that, bring them to justice. I think there needs to be a greater sense of control around that airport.

So there are a lot of things that need to be done to make that airport for civilization, which it isn't right now.

Let me just make the point that the people who have the greatest stake in this, perhaps, are the people of Lebanon, the people of Beirut. I've spent time there myself, both in the good days when Beirut was a great place and, of course, in more recent times. And those are wonderful people with a great culture and a great flare for things. And Beirut at one time was a crossroads. And they have the greatest stake of anybody in bringing it back to its former state. And it's a long ways from there now.

LEHRER: Well, is the airport not now under the control of the Amal movement of the Shiite Moslems?

SECRETARY SHULTZ: It seems to be more or less under their control. But it's a loose sort of proposition.

LEHRER: Have you asked or has somebody asked the Amal to come up with these hijackers and turn them over to the United States, or take some action of some kind against them?

SECRETARY SHULTZ: We will be in that process, and it's going to be handled by the Justice Department.

LEHRER: And what would be the process, Mr. Secretary?

SECRETARY SHULTZ: The process of identifying those responsible and bringing them to justice, directly in Beirut, or, if they wish, in other ways.

LEHRER: What are the realistic prospects of that ever happening, sir?

SECRETARY SHULTZ: Well, we're going to work on it, and we'll see. And it's one of the tests.

LEHRER: Who's being tested?

SECRETARY SHULTZ: The people of Beirut, who presumably want to have their country part of civilized society and their airport operating and other commercial facilities operating as part of the world economy, are being tested.

LEHRER: Now, the action that the United States is going to take to try to close the airport, the announcement that I read

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said that all American flights will be suspended. But there aren't any really scheduled American flights there now, anyhow, are there, sir?

SECRETARY SHULTZ: There are a number of flights that go back and forth between the United States and Beirut directly is negligible.

LEHRER: So who are you going to...

SECRETARY SHULTZ: There are a number of ways in which people get ticketed to Beirut in the United States through other airlines. We'll stop that.

We are going out to people throughout the world, governments, and asking them to take a similar step. There are more flights, obviously, between Beirut and other points that are closer to it than the United States.

We felt that we had to take a step ourselves before we could suggest to others that they do likewise.

LEHRER: What can you do specifically about Middle East Airlines, which is the Lebanese airline and is the main airline, obviously, that flies in and out of Beirut? What are you going to do about them?

SECRETARY SHULTZ: We're not trying to do something about that airline. We're trying to do something about that airport. Actually, that airline flies throughout the Middle East and other points. And as you know, the Beirut airport has been out of commission, in effect, for long stretches of time. But the airline has continued to go ahead and fly.

We're not out to get the airline. We're out to get the airport put off limits and made -- changed so that it is not a haven for terrorists.

LEHRER: Mr. Secretary, is today's action on the airport the only thing that's going to be done in the next -- today or in the next few days, or is it the first of many things to come?

SECRETARY SHULTZ: It's the -- it is part of a program of efforts to combat terrorism. This program has been going on for a long time. Unfortunately, I'm afraid it's going to have to continue to go on for a long time. It has a definite strategy to it. And I'll be glad to describe it to you if you want to, but it takes a little time.

LEHRER: Well, we've got it, so I'd love to hear it.

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SECRETARY SHULTZ: Well, first of all, I think it's important that the American people and people throughout the world become convinced that the terrorist threat is a genuine threat to our civilization. I thin, unfortunately, the terrorists are doing a pretty good job of convincing people of that.

I think we also have to have people see that in the tactics of handling terrorists, it's a mistake to give in to their demands, to let them be successful. When they're successful, all you do is encourage them. So there is an educational process here about the nature of terrorism, its international dimensions, and the tactical choices involved in handling a particular problem, such as the one we had.

So that's the first step. That's been going on. We've articulated these problems in past speeches. And that's an ongoing proposition.

The second thing, and critical, is intelligence about terrorism, intelligence on behalf of the United States and of other governments. And then linking our intelligence together so that we know what's going on.

As one measure of some progress here and that results can be obtained, in the first nine -- last nine months, there have been a little over 60 discoveries of plots or intentions that have been uncovered or stopped, something done about them. Some of them have been publicized, others not. But we're beginning to learn how to do this. And I think those who are involved in terrorism would be surprised at the amount of information that's being accumulated about them.

The third thing is to take defensive measures -- I'm sorry. Did somebody...

LEHRER: No, I was just listening.

SECRETARY SHULTZ: I got something else through here.

LEHRER: I'm sorry. Apologize for that.

SECRETARY SHULTZ: The third thing is to take defense measures of the kind that have been in effect for quite a while on airlines, like our airport security and airplane security. Obviously, it's hard to keep people up all the time, but we have to do that. It has worked. Some 35,000 firearms or other explosive charges have been seized at American airports over the last 20 years as a result of the surveillance procedures.

So, there are things that can be done that work.

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Our embassies are being changed around so that they are more secure places, and so on. There are a lot of those kinds of measures.

And finally, I think we have to bring ourselves to a more active defensive posture, so that we do things about terrorism and to terrorists that raise the cost to them of what they're doing; and also get ourselves in a position where we can preempt things that they might do. And the 60-or-so incidents that I mentioned are examples of that, but I think, unfortunately, we're probably going to have to do it with more force at times.

LEHRER: Well, thank you.

JUDY WOODRUFF: Mr. Secretary, has the Administration ruled out specific strikes against the terrorist training camps in Lebanon where some of these people who were responsible might be based?

SECRETARY SHULTZ: I'm not going to discuss things we might have ruled out or ruled in, or whatever, that are prospective of that kind.

WOODRUFF: There was a report out of London today that Iran may be tied in with the hijacking. Does the Administration have any information along those lines?

SECRETARY SHULTZ: Well, we have information that links Iran with various elements of Khomeini supporters in Lebanon. But we have no evidence of Iran being directly involved in the inception of the hijacking.

WOODRUFF: Does the Administration know who the original hijackers were?

SECRETARY SHULTZ: Yes.

WOODRUFF: Can you go after them?

SECRETARY SHULTZ: We will.

WOODRUFF: In what fashion?

SECRETARY SHULTZ: You'll see. You'll see.

WOODRUFF: You mean Admin...

SECRETARY SHULTZ: Among other things, I think there are legal steps that will be taken. And it's important to take them.

WOODRUFF: What do you mean, legal steps? You mean in a

situation...

SECRETARY SHULTZ: Well, these people committed crimes. Murder is a crime. Hijacking is a crime.

WOODRUFF: But do legal steps work in a country where you have near-anarchy, as we have in Lebanon?

SECRETARY SHULTZ: They may or may not. But we will take them nevertheless. And then we'll take other steps.

WOODRUFF: How much concern is there when you consider any retaliatory steps -- and I presume you consider what you're talking about retaliation. Is that the proper...

SECRETARY SHULTZ: I don't consider that bringing somebody to justice is really retaliation. It's just justice. If somebody murders another person, you want to find that person and try that person and sentence that person properly for that deed.

WOODRUFF: But if that sort of proper judicial process is not available, would the Administration consider steps outside that?

SECRETARY SHULTZ: We'll have to see how we will proceed as we go.

WOODRUFF: How much, in the context of that, do you take into consideration the fact that innocent lives, the lives of innocent people might be lost in some type retaliatory...

SECRETARY SHULTZ: Well, we have absolutely no desire, and great concern, that innocent lives not be lost. That's obviously something that you have to have on your mind.

WOODRUFF: What about the other seven Americans kidnapped who are being held, we believe, somewhere in Lebanon? Do we have any more information at this point about where they are or any hope that we can get them back?

SECRETARY SHULTZ: We certainly have hope, and we have been working hard on this continuously. And we have tried to not only get the hostages that were held and were released, but to use the momentum created by that to get the other seven released too. And we continue to try to build on that.

WOODRUFF: What do you think the prospects are?

SECRETARY SHULTZ: Well, I'm not going to try to lay down probabilities. We've been working at it for over a year,

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and it's frustrating because we haven't got them out. But we're going to keep working at it continuously.

WOODRUFF: You think the chances are better as a result of the hijacking incident?

SECRETARY SHULTZ: Well, at least it created a certain momentum, perhaps. And we'll try to build on it.

WOODRUFF: The Administra -- you have said, the President has said, "We're not going to make any deals with terrorists." And yet these people who committed the hijacking and the people who cooperated have, in essence, got what they wanted, or they appear to be getting what they wanted. Three hundred of the Shiite prisoners in Israel are being released, with prospects that the rest will be released.

What have they lost by doing this?

SECRETARY SHULTZ: My understanding is that probably those who will be released, that Israel announced it's releasing, would have been released some time ago had it not been for the hijackers and their demands. In other words, Israel has said long before this took place, and they've repeated as we've gone along, that they intended to release those prisoners, that they were there, as the Defense Minister, Rabin, said yesterday, temporarily. And so they have resumed something that was stopped by the hijackers.

So, they didn't achieve this release. They had held it up.

WOODRUFF: But Mr. Secretary, my point is neither have they lost anything. It was what they wanted. And it appears now that it's going to happen. And they're none the worse off for having done what they did.

SECRETARY SHULTZ: I think they have lost a great deal, and the people of Lebanon have lost a great deal, the people of Beirut have lost a great deal.

Of course, it is a kind of chaotic situation right there, anyway, right now. But still, they get themselves more and more classified as a place that's outside the boundaries of civilized life. And that's a very tough thing to do. And the hijackers have been doing that to their neighbors.

WOODRUFF: But what is to stop them from trying it again, to stop them or any other terrorists from trying this exact same sort of hijacking again?

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SECRETARY SHULTZ: The things -- we must act on this. And that's the kind of program that I was describing here a while ago. And we are making progress with it.

WOODRUFF: But at this point, what's to stop a group of terrorists, like the ones who took over the TWA plane, from trying it again at some airport somewhere?

SECRETARY SHULTZ: What is to stop them is better security in airports, raise the level of that very strongly; to rally the international community to see how terrible this is, and not just for the United States, but for countries all over the world. So that when a hijacking takes place, if it does -- perhaps it will -- it is dealt with firmly at places where the plane comes down, and so on and so on and so on. We have to keep working at these things. That doesn't say that there's a perfect system out there.

WOODRUFF: But again, you've said, the President has said terrorists are going to be held accountable. And as of this point, the people who pulled this off are running around, free men.

SECRETARY SHULTZ: They're running around, free men. And to a certain extent, they've been exalted by all of the interviews that have been held during this period. And it is one of the problems, that as soon as somebody becomes a terrorist, that person becomes a celebrity, and he's being interviewed constantly on television and held up, and his opinions are sought, and so on. I think that's another kind of problem to deal with here.

So, there are problems. But it seems to me that we have to let it sink in to the people of Beirut that those they are harboring are doing them great damage. And we have to develop our techniques for getting back at them, too.

WOODRUFF: Do you really believe, sir, that that message is getting through?

SECRETARY SHULTZ: I don't know, but we're going to try to get it through.

WOODRUFF: Because, I mean, it seems to me, from their perspective right now, what they must be thinking is, "We pulled up a big one on the United States."

SECRETARY SHULTZ: I don't think so. We have our hostages back and we are proceeding to work on this problem.

WOODRUFF: But they're getting their prisoners back, as well.

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SECRETARY SHULTZ: They stopped the flow of those prisoners, the release of that flow, and it's starting up again.

WOODRUFF: Did the United States learn any other lessons from this?

SECRETARY SHULTZ: I hope the American people, generally, have learned a lot from it and that we have an enhanced awareness of this problem, of the difficulties of dealing with it; and yet, nevertheless, the right kind of strategy for dealing with it; and that we will have more and more support for doing things that are effective on this.

I have been speaking on this subject, myself, for about a year and a half. And some of the things that I said a year ago were greeted as very controversial and outlandish. And by this time, all those statements are sort of in the mainstream of what people think. So there has been a change.

WOODRUFF: You mentioned the role that the -- you alluded to the role that the media has played in all this, in making celebrities of the people...

SECRETARY SHULTZ: Yes. I think it's bad.

WOODRUFF: It's bad.

Is there anything that can be done or should be done about it, in your view?

SECRETARY SHULTZ: Well, it may be that there's nothing to be done. The networks and the news media compete to do these things, and we have to manage it. I think it's really amazing what the media are able to do. They're impressive. And to some extent, they have gone places that we weren't able to go to, so we learned something from it. On the other hand, they disclose things, the disclosure of which hurt our efforts. And then there's a sort of a maudlin quality to a lot of it, I think.

WOODRUFF: How do...

SECRETARY SHULTZ: But there's a lot of self-censorship going on, I notice.

WOODRUFF: You said hurt your efforts. How did it hurt your...

SECRETARY SHULTZ: If U.S. movements or things that we might be doing are highly publicized, then you tell the people that you're trying to deal with, the hijackers, information that we'd just as soon they not have. Or if there's a lot of talk

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about the possibility that it has an effect on their behavior.

I don't know what to do about it. It's a free press, and I believe in a free press and I wouldn't suggest anything else. but it is a problem in managing something like this.

WOODRUFF: Just one other thing. As a result of their help in all this, is Syria now more a friend of the United States in the Middle East?

SECRETARY SHULTZ: Well, we're very glad that President Assad and Syria did what they did. And we hope that we can build on that. But nevertheless -- and we hope that they will help us get the seven that are held in that area out.

WOODRUFF: Secretary of State Shultz, we thank you for being with us.