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FILE ONLY

HIJACK-SHI'ITES
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BEIRUT

Shi'ite Moslem anger that boiled over into the hijacking of a TWA airliner is rooted in a series of events perceived as affronts by the Shi'ites -- a bombing blamed on the CIA and U.S. backing for Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon.

The continued detention of more than 700 Shi'ites in an Israeli prison and heavy losses in feuding with Palestinian guerrillas in Beirut also contributed to feelings of frustration felt by Lebanon's traditionally under-privileged Shi'ite community.

The pent-up Shi'ite bitterness against the United States and Israel finally exploded last week with the hijack of the TWA airliner to Beirut and the holding of 40 American hostages. Convinced that force is now the only language Washington and Tel Aviv understand, militants seized the plane in a bid to free the 700 Shi'ites held by Israel without legal process or protection.

The leader of the Shi'ite Amal militia, Nabih Berri, who is also Lebanon's justice minister, said the action was no different from Israel's "hijack" of Lebanese prisoners.

"It is a noble cause," said Amal politburo chief Akef Haidar.

The hijack was sparked by outrage at Israel's continued imprisonment of the Shi'ites, despite a June 10 announcement that its withdrawal from south Lebanon was complete.

The deportations are the latest in a long list of Shi'ite grievances against Israel and Washington, its main backer, whose super-power status is perceived as giving Israel immunity for any violent action it pleases in Lebanon.

For three years anti-U.S. and anti-Israeli frustration has been rising among the Shi'ites, Lebanon's biggest community, as they battle to the forefront of national affairs after centuries of poverty and under-privilege.

Spearheaded by the Amal militia, they face heavy odds in the fight for power, but difficulties have only increased their determination -- and anger.

They are angrier than ever now, after losing hundreds of fighters in an abortive four-week battle to seize Beirut's Palestinian refugee camps and prevent a resurgence of Palestinian power after Israel's departure from south

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Lebanon.

The hijacked TWA plane stands near a grim reminder of that battle -- the hulk of a Jordanian airliner blown up last week by Shi'ite hijackers infuriated by Arab criticism of the siege.

Israeli and U.S. backing for Lebanon's Christian minority has helped frustrate efforts by the Shi'ites and their Moslem allies to win a fairer share of state power, focussing anger on Tel Aviv and Washington.

The Shi'ites' two-year-old battle to drive Israel's troops and client militias from the south intensified the anger.

Israel's "iron fist" response and Washington's actions to protect it from international censure further heightened the Shi'ites' frustration and sense of isolation.

The Israeli and U.S. stances, and the stalemate in the Lebanese conflict, have radicalized the once-tolerant Shi'ites and caused a surge of religious fundamentalism amongst them.

Militant groups following the line of Iranian leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini have sprung up to challenge Amal's reformism and forced Berri to adopt more radical postures.

One such group, Berri says, hijacked the U.S. plane and holds the Americans hostage in a bid to force Washington to pressure the Israelis into freeing their Shi'ite prisoners.

The main U.S. and Israeli actions that have angered Lebanon's Shi'ites in the past three years are:

-- Israel's June 1982 invasion and its three-year occupation of the south.

The battle to end the occupation brought the deaths of hundreds of Shi'ites, thousands of detentions, the demolition of scores of homes, the flight of thousands of Shi'ites and heavy damage to the south's economy.

-- U.S. military and political backing for Christian President Amin Gemayel from September 1982 to February 1984.

Reagan launched a crash training and equipment program for Gemayel's army, which then battled Moslem militias.

U.S. officers were in the army's main operations room in early 1984 as its American-made tanks and big guns for six weeks pounded much of Beirut's Shi'ite suburbs to rubble.

U.S. Marines in a Beirut multinational force fought artillery duels with Moslem militias. The battleship New Jersey and other warships pounded Moslem positions to support the marines and Gemayel's troops.

-- Washington's refusal to press Israel to moderate its military actions in south Lebanon and U.S. vetoes of U.N. Security Council resolutions censuring the Israelis.

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In September 1984, Washington vetoed a resolution presented by Lebanon urging Israeli troops to respect international laws and conventions in the south.

In March 1985, Washington vetoed a second resolution condemning Israel's "iron fist" policy after Israeli troops killed 37 people in a southern Shi'ite village.

The vetoes were seen as open U.S. hostility towards Lebanon. Expressing the bitterness of Moslem moderates, Sunni government minister Selim Hoss said:

"How can America prevent the censure of the destruction of homes, burning of orchards, killing of innocents and sieges of villages on Lebanese soil, while it condemns what it regards as the violation of human rights in other countries?"

Shi'ite anger was more direct: "America is the source of terrorism," said Sheikh Ibrahim al-Amin, a leader of the pro-Iranian Hizbollah (Party of God).

"It is up to the people, who have the right to retaliate . . . To amputate the hand of the aggressor," he added.

Last March, Shi'ites accused Washington of responsibility for a car bomb that killed about 80 people in a Beirut Shi'ite suburb. The attack appeared to be a bid to kill Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, considered Hizbollah's spiritual guide.

The United States denied involvement in the bombing. Reports from Washington said the bombing was carried out by a group of Lebanese and that the operation was not authorized by the CIA.

A worried Amal politburo member, Dr Ghassan Siblani, who has dual Lebanese and U.S. citizenship, said he feared all sides in Lebanon, including the Shi'ites, were in danger of being taken over by extremists.

After the American vetoes, he pointed out the dilemma Washington had created for the mainstream Shi'ite movement.

"How can we ask our people to continue protecting Americans here (against Shi'ite extremists) when they refuse to protect our people in the south against Israel?" he asked.

Two years ago, Hizbollah was a loose grouping of pro-Iranian Shi'ite clerics. Today, it has a fighting force with field artillery and U.S.-made armored vehicles mounted with rockets.

Such groups are thought responsible for many kidnaps of Americans and bloody car bombings of U.S. targets in Beirut that have followed U.S. initiatives against Lebanon's Moslems.

Shi'ite anger was soothed in April when Washington joined the United Nations and International Red Cross in criticizing Israel's deportation of 1,200 south Lebanese prisoners.