
SYRIA AND RUSSIA: A LONG AND TANGLED HISTORY THAT INVOLVES THE USS LIBERTY

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What did Syria (and by extension Russia) have to do with the Israeli attack on the USS Liberty almost 50 years ago?

Lots, according to Anthony R. Wells, a veteran of U.S. and British intelligence. In his new book, *A Tale of Two Navies* (a study of the U.S. Navy and the Royal Navy since 1960, with an emphasis on intelligence gathering and sharing), Wells says that it all has to do with Israeli plans in 1967 to invade Syria.

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Wells reports that in May of that year, the Syrians told the Soviets that in the event of war, the Israelis planned to attack Syria, occupy Damascus and depose the Baathists. The Russians made plans to intervene and come to the aid of Syria. Red Army paratroopers would muster in Hungary, fly in An-12s over Yugoslavia and down the Adriatic and the Mediterranean. Yugoslavia had granted overflight rights, he writes.

But the U.S. government did not want to come to the aid of Israel and wind up fighting the Red Army on the Golan Heights, he says.

The Liberty, a U.S. Navy intelligence ship, was tuning into Soviet communications about all this. It was intercepting Israeli plans and moves via a series of surrogate communications. (Tom: I am not quite sure what that means, but I think it means it was picking up what the Soviets were telling the Egyptians and Syrians.) In the process, it was finding out more than the Israelis would tolerate, Wells writes.

The ship was attacked by fast boats and aircraft, hit with a torpedo, cannon fire, and napalm, killing 34 and wounding 174 — which sounds to me like basically the whole crew. Wells reports that he interviewed Dean Rusk, secretary of state at the time, who concluded that the Israelis wanted Liberty sunk without trace or survivors, no one to tell what had been done or by whom.

Of course, none of this means anything to President Donald Trump, who blithely discussed Syria with his supporter Russian President Vladimir Putin over the weekend.

In other Trump-related news, he signed the anti-Muslim immigration order in the Pentagons Hall of Heroes, which honors recipients of the Medal of Honor. He then handed the order to Defense Secretary James Mattis. As Ryan Evans notes, this was disgusting of Trump, and sorrowful to see Mattis made part of it. One of the lessons of fascist takeovers is that you have to draw a bright line, balking even at relatively small symbolic acts, like the location of the signing. Mattis has a large soul but enough small bits will consume it.

Kaynak/Source: