

U.S. Relations With Egypt Strained After Hijacking

WASHINGTON (WNS) — U.S. relations with both Egypt and Italy remain strained in the aftermath of the Achille Lauro hijacking.

The Reagan Administration announced that U.S. war planes had intercepted an Egyptian civilian airplane carrying the hijackers of the Italian cruise ship Achille Lauro and, without firing a shot, forced it to land in Sigonella, Italy, where the terrorists were taken into Italian custody for eventual prosecution.

The plane also carried two Palestinians. One was reportedly a PLO official sent by Arafat to Port Said, Egypt, to act as an intermediary in the negotiations with the terrorists for the ship's release. The other was Muhammad Abbas,

head of the Palestine Liberation Front, a pro-Arafat faction of the PLO.

Israel has charged that the attack on the Achille Lauro was the work of the PLO, and that Abbas was involved in planning it. Abbas was recently elected to the PLO's 11-member executive committee at Arafat's behest.

Abbas was released by Italy and left for Yugoslavia. It was reported from Belgrade that Abbas had left the country for an undisclosed destination. Yugoslavia, a non-aligned nation, supports

the PLO, which has an embassy in Belgrade.

President Reagan's National Security Adviser, Robert McFarlane, said in response to a question he had no reason to believe Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak lied when he told reporters hours before the plane with the terrorists departed from Egypt -- that the hijackers were not on Egyptian territory.

Meanwhile, Mubarak expressed harsh criticism of the U.S. for its intercept of the Egyptian plane. He said

the U.S. action and Israel's air strike against the PLO headquarters in Tunisia were "Serious setbacks" to Mideast peace. He demanded that the U.S. publicly apologize for intercepting the plane. Reagan said he would

"never" apologize.

Deputy State Department spokesperson Charles Redman said, regarding the interception of the Egyptian plane, that "We explained at some length why we felt compelled to take the action."

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