



Japanese Terror Strikes Israel

The Lod Airport Massacre

The world was shocked in 1972 when a Japanese terror group (trained by Arab terrorists) carried out an attack in Israel's Lod International Airport, indiscriminately killing more than two dozen and wounding many more. For Israel and the world, it was another example of how low the haters of civilization could descend. For some citizens of Japan, it was even worse: a severe wound to their national pride. For the father of the one surviving terrorist, it was such a stain on his pride that he begged the authorities to execute his son rather than merely imprison him for life.

- Shimon Rosenberg

Air France Flight 132 —Rome to Tel Aviv

Monday night, May 29, 1972

The passengers on Air France Flight 132 were happy as the airplane prepared to take off from the airport in Rome en route to Tel Aviv. Most were looking forward to their upcoming vacation in Israel.

There were few Jews on this flight. Most of the passengers belonged to a group of 120 devout Christians from Puerto Rico who were on a 10-day pilgrimage. Having visited Rome, they were now on their way to the Holy Land.

When three Orientals boarded the plane with them, none of the other passengers paid much attention. A glance at their passports would have clarified that the three were Japanese citizens, but not much more. The knowledge that they were members of the Japanese Red Army would also have meant little to most people, who would have assumed they belonged to a secret Japanese military unit.

The plane took off at last, pointing its nose toward Israel. The flight was routine and comfortable. The three Japanese sat in silence throughout the trip. The moment they landed in Lod, however, they rushed off the plane and headed straight for the carousel where their baggage would appear.

It was now 10:15 PM on May 30. Kozo Okamoto and his two companions waited for their suitcases to appear. As soon as all three had claimed their baggage, they pulled out from the suitcases large automatic guns, grenades and other weapons. The other passengers, claiming their packages or streaming toward customs, broke out in shouts of hysteria and panic.

Kozo Okamoto and the Red Army

Kozo Okamoto was born in 1947 to an upper class Japanese family, one of six

children. His father was a respected school principal. They were taught that each person is unique and that nobody deserves to be mistreated. Some of his children, however, took these otherwise noble ideas to the extreme and became involved in radical, left-wing movements. One of Kozo's brothers, Takeshi, joined the Japanese Red Army (JRA) terror group, eventually drawing his youngest brother, Kozo, in as well.

The JRA was one of the most extreme of the many groups founded around the world during the turmoil of the 1970s and 80s. The members of the Red Army identified themselves with the radical views of communist Leon Trotsky (incidentally, a Jew from a religious background who had studied as a child in a *cheder*). His typically Marxist ideas included a world uprising on the part of the working class against the upper class that enslaved them. The Red Army believed that extreme brutality was necessary to free the working class from the clutches of the upper class, and it planned a series of shocking terror attacks.

The first attack by the JRA took place in 1970. Nine members of the group hijacked Japan Airlines Flight 351 on its way from Tokyo to Fukuoka, forcing the pilot to divert to communist North Korea. That incident involved no physical attacks. Nobody was injured and the terrorists agreed to free all 122 passengers and 7 crewmembers in exchange for a couple of largely symbolic hostages.

After releasing some of the passengers in the Fukuoka Airport and others in the Kimpa Airport in South Korea, they landed in Pyongyang, North Korea, where they declared at a press conference that the hijacking had been carried out to show their solidarity with North Korea and to protest the economic sanctions America, Japan and South Korea had placed on North Korea to oppress the working people there.

The North Korean authorities warmly welcomed the "revolutionaries" and offered them political asylum, but insisted that they

must first learn from the North Koreans the correct way to use revolutionary tactics. Apparently, they taught the nine Japanese a lesson, because in 1971 they appeared before the press to state that although they still believed in revolution they admitted that the hijacking was a mistake.

One of the nine hijackers was Kozo's older brother, Takeshi.

Japan Tolerates "Regulated Violence"

The 1970 hijacking was just the first attack, however. In the ensuing years the Red Army carried out direct attacks against the wealthy as well as against senior police officers. For the most part, these attacks were not outstanding in any way, mirroring similar incidents involving student protesters in America and other lands.

The 1960s were a time when many students were disillusioned with society and joined various radical and leftist movements, including some that tried to use violence to achieve their goals. Japan was also swept up in the wave of student protest movements, but—and here the curious Japanese mentality comes into play—the violence was sanctioned by Japanese authorities so long as the students did not cross certain clearly defined boundaries that were set down as law.

And the police, from their side, also maintained set discipline as to how they responded to these protests. Both sides wore protective gear such as helmets and even shields, but firearms, explosives or any item that could potentially serve as a weapon could not be used by either side. Only materials such as wood or plastic, which can inflict harm but would likely not result in fatalities, could be used.

Students and police worked in tandem, with everyone waiting for a prearranged signal before the protesters turned violent. The students would unite to attack

a specific target and the police would unite to prevent them from reaching it. Arrests took place only when the regulations were broken.

One of the reasons why the system of regulated violence was permitted to last for as long as it did was that it is difficult to obtain weapons like guns and knives in Japan, and even many police officers are unarmed. At the same time, both the police and students are trained in judo or other martial arts. This means that law enforcement officials do not have the upper hand in mass protests and the only means of maintaining some semblance of control is by having both sides stick to a set of prearranged rules.

Obviously, with such strict discipline required of them, even when they were protesting against the government, some students sought opportunities to break the rules and turned to organizations like the JRA who advocated unrestrained violence.

But the JRA suffered from one critical drawback: its members did not have even the most basic knowledge of how to inflict real terror. And the reason is that weapons are in severe shortage in that island nation. Even Japan's "Self Defense Forces" are severely restricted when compared to other armies, and recruits go through what would be considered a comically low level of training in other lands.



An Air France airplane on its way from Rome to Tel Aviv.

