



Educator's Guide

Operation Thunderbolt (Entebbe)

Operation Thunderbolt, later renamed Operation Yonatan after the mission's daring leader, Yoni Netanyahu, has taken on a mythical status in Israel's public memory. Israel took on a colossal risk by sending special forces to Uganda to save Jewish people who were aboard a hijacked Air France flight before taken hostage by terrorists and held in Uganda. The mission was a great success with the vast majority of the hostages emerging from this nightmare. Israelis and Jews celebrated throughout the world, and the world looked on with astonishment with the achievement of the Israeli military. Three questions stick out from this event. Are there circumstances when we should negotiate with terrorists or not? Who deserves credit for this daring operation, and does it even matter? Should the State of Israel be responsible for the safety of Jews around the world?

Video: <https://unpacked.education/video/operation-thunderbolt-entebbe/>

Further Reading

1. Yehuda Avner, *The Prime Ministers*, chapter 23,
2. Uri Dromi, "How Entebbe changed Israel",
<https://www.thejc.com/comment/analysis/how-entebbe-changed-israel-1.59887>
3. Saul David, "Israel's Raid on Entebbe Was Almost a Disaster",
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/11701064/Israels-raid-on-Entebbe-was-almost-a-disaster.html>

Review - Did the students understand the material?

1. Which previous events factored into Israel's decision-making at this time?



2. Operation Thunderbolt was renamed to honor its leader, Yoni Netanyahu, by calling it Operation Jonathan. He is the brother of which modern-day politician?
3. Operation Thunderbolt took place after which harrowing event in Israeli history, helping to boost Israel's image and morale?
 - a. Sinai Campaign
 - b. Six-Day War
 - c. Yom Kippur War (correct)
 - d. First Lebanon War
4. Approximately how far is Uganda from Israel?
 - a. 100 miles
 - b. 500 miles
 - c. 1,500 miles
 - d. 2,500 miles (correct)

Discussion Questions

1. Does a good decision depend on the outcome? If many hostages had been killed, would you still think the decision to rescue them was the right one, or think that Israel should have instead negotiated with the terrorists?
2. While there is some controversy over who deserves the credit for this mission--Yoni Netanyahu, Muki Betzer, Shimon Peres, Yitzhak Rabin--does it ultimately matter? Why or why not?
3. Why was this event so amazing for Jews and non-Jews around the world?
4. What did it mean to Jews around the world to know that Israel was capable of, and ready to take action on their behalf?



Reflection Questions

1. One enduring lesson of Operation Thunderbolt is the value of leaders debating and discussing rather than one person suggesting an idea and everyone else nodding in agreement. Shimon Peres said, “If leaders demand allegiance without creativity and outside inspiration, the odds of failure vastly increase.” How can you internalize this idea of demanding alternative perspectives in your own life?
2. In hindsight, it’s easy to say that Israel made the right decision. But Israeli general Shlomo Gazit stated that “the decision to invade Entebbe was one of the most difficult decisions ever taken by the General Staff of the government of Israel.” If you were in the leadership’s shoes, would you have advocated for negotiations or undertaking this daring mission? Explain.
3. In some ways, Yoni Netanyahu is the paradigmatic hero, who sacrificed his life to fight for the Jewish people in a variety of contexts. Yet heroism can take many shapes, and from the Letters of Yoni, we see an altogether different side of him. For some, heroism is achieved in the glorious moments on the battlefields. For others, heroism can manifest itself in the mundaneness of day-to-day life. Why do you think Yoni is such a hero and icon for the Jewish people, and in what ways can you emulate Yoni’s heroism?