

Super 'Special Ops' Hercules for India



Operation Entebbe/Entebbe Raid/Operation Thunderbolt was a daringly executed counter-terrorism hostage rescue mission carried out by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) at Entebbe Airport in Uganda on the night of 3 July and early morning of 4 July 1976 in which Israeli operated C-130 Hercules played a pivotal role. Originally codenamed Operation Thunderball/Thunderbolt, the operation was later renamed Operation Yonatan in memory Lieutenant Colonel Yonatan Netanyahu who was killed in action. In the wake of the hijacking of Air France Flight 139 and the hijackers' threats to kill the hostages if their demands were not met, a plan was drawn up to airlift the hostages to safety still taking into account of possible hostile involvement of Ugandan military troops.

On 3 July, the Israeli cabinet approved a rescue mission, Operation Entebbe, under the command of Major General Yekutiel Adam and Deputy Commander Matan Vilnai. Brigadier General Dan Shomron was appointed to command the operation on the ground. After days of intelligence gathering and assessment by Netanyahu's deputy Moshe Betser, four (arguably three) Israeli Defence Force-Air Force (IDF-AF) C-130 Hercules 'transport' aircraft flew discreetly to Entebbe. Initially

crossing Sharm al-Sheikh, and down the international flight path over the Red Sea, a flying height of no more than 100 feet was maintained to avoid radar detection by hostile Egyptian, Sudanese and Saudi Arabian forces. Near the south outlet of the Red Sea the IDF-AF C-130s

turned right and passed south of Djibouti. From there they went to a point Northeast of Nairobi, Kenya then turning west passing through the African Rift Valley and over Lake Victoria. They were accompanied by two Boeing 707 jets with the first Boeing carrying medical facilities landing at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in Nairobi, Kenya whereas the commander of the operation, General Yekutiel Adam on board the second Boeing that circled over Entebbe Airport during the operation.

Approach was at the Entebbe airport was executed by cover of night minus aid of Entebbe ground control and in a tightly controlled 'single file' ensuring that they would present a single radar signature even if spotted. While one IDF-AF C-130 was extensively used for deceptive operations (details irrelevant here) the other C-130 Hercules platforms landed and unloaded Armoured Personnel Carriers (APC). They were used for defence during the anticipated hour of refuelling, destruction of Ugandan MiG-17 jet fighters at the airport and for intelligence gathering. Within 30 minutes all eight hijackers were eliminated as against loss of single Israeli commando plus five injured. Out of the one hundred and five hostages, only three lost their lives and around ten were wounded. Nearly

fifty Ugandan soldiers were killed during the raid. Only one hostage remained behind and executed by Ugandan army officers later. The rescued hostages were flown to Israel via Nairobi.

In Indian context, Lockheed Martin and Tata Advanced Systems Limited (TASL) have entered into a teaming agreement to expand upon the companies' business relationship through the C-130J-30 Super Hercules tactical airlifter. This announcement marks a significant step in enhancing India's defence and aerospace capabilities while also deepening India-US strategic ties. This agreement provides a framework for collaboration on future potential business opportunities to include establishing a Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) facility in India to support the Indian Air Force's (IAF) existing fleet of 12 C-130J-30s as well as other global Super Hercules fleets plus expanding C-130J manufacturing and assembly in India to produce aircraft for the IAF's Medium Transport Aircraft (MTA) programme, subject to US and Indian government approvals. The IAF is actively seeking to acquire up to 80 medium transport aircraft and issued a Request for Information (RFI) last year. Lockheed Martin responded to the RFI as the C-130J-30 Super Hercules is ideally suited to meet the requirements. Lockheed Martin will continue to build C-130Js for the US government and other global operators at the existing Super Hercules production facility in Marietta, Georgia, USA. Lockheed Martin will establish additional production and assembly capacity in India if awarded the MTA contract. The projected scenario will also enable a significant proportion of IAF transport fleet capable of undertaking Special Operations, extremely relevant in background of disturbing and unstable political situation around the subcontinent.