

*First to be
freed on
Sunday, 23 APR 1998*



THE WASHINGTON POST

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Arriving in Damascus after his kidnapers freed him in Beirut, former hostage Robert Polhill, left, shakes hands with Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk

White House Statement

Associated Press

Transcript of President Bush's statement on the hostage release, read by White House press secretary Marlin Fitzwater:

We are pleased at the news that Robert Polhill has been freed by his captors. He and his family are obviously happy for his family and for his friends.

We also wish to thank those who had a hand in the case, particularly the governments of Syria and Iran, whose efforts have contributed to the release of this page.

Our satisfaction at the case, however, is substantially tempered by the knowledge that seven other innocent Americans, as well as a number of foreign nationals, are still being illegally held hostage in Lebanon.

"We cannot rest until all hostages are free. Once again we urgently call on all parties who hold hostages or who have any influence to work to obtain the immediate and unconditional release of the remaining hostages as a humanitarian gesture."

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I Strived to Continue to Be Angry ...

Associated Press

DAMASCUS, Syria, April 22—Following are excerpts from a Syrian state television interview with released American hostage Robert Polhill.

How do you feel after being released?

I'm very happy and grateful to all the people who spent time on my case. I'm still deeply concerned about my two friends and others who are still held in the conditions I was held in. Some of them have been held longer than me. My happiness tonight is a bit toned down that they're not with me. I'm looking forward that we'll be together again, all of us. . . .

I don't know where I'm going. I think it's better you ask me specific questions. I'm not sure. I can't summarize 39 months of my life. It's a little bit difficult at this moment. I didn't have time to begin reflecting yet on those 39 months of my life.

How was your first day in captivity?

I remember my first day in captivity more than the rest of my days in captivity. . . . It was boring.

We were not allowed to speak loudly. We had something to read, but we were deprived of materials that gave any news about us.

As to our specific conditions, I can tell you it could have been a lot worse. We were not maltreated, thanks to those who guarded us, who tried to give us things within the limits of the restrictions on them. We played cards. . . .

We were very much in the dark about our status. We didn't know where we stood. That was the worst. We didn't know . . . when or whether we were ever going to be released. In fact, I know that those left behind and others still in captivity in places I'm not aware of . . . quite possibly don't know that I've been released. But I guess they'll have hope if they know I've been released.

What does freedom mean to you?

Freedom is something that, believe it or not, neither me nor my two associates spent a lot of time thinking about. It's a bit like you wish you had a T-bone steak in front of you. Knowing you were not

going to get it right away makes you more hungry, makes you want that steak more. So we didn't spend time thinking or talking about when we'd be freed.

Our most difficult assignment was to find things to think about. To keep our minds active so we didn't begin to vegetate. I don't know what psychologists say about this. My belief is that part of the symptom of a mind beginning to stray and go bad to the point of danger, is the loss of anger. I was angry at what was done to me, at being taken away from my wife and family, my friends and students. And so I strived to continue to be angry, knowing at all times that if I began to lose that anger I would just sort of become a vegetable, and I didn't want that to happen.

What do you want to say to the world?

One thing I probably should say is that I was a little bit surprised to find out that the specific demand these men [the kidnappers] are making and want the world to know seems to be precisely the same they made about two weeks after our kidnapping, when Alann Steen made the videotape—releasing the 400 prisoners held in Israeli jails. We seem right back at ground zero.

One of the last words I heard today from one of them as they went out was that was still their demand. I don't know if it's still the same 400 prisoners or others.

Besides that, I don't think I have any other messages that I'm supposed to be carrying to the people or governments of the world or the United Nations. . . . As I say, this is rather surprising. I'd have thought things would have changed over the three years, that some of those prisoners got released, I don't know.

What are your plans for the future?

I really don't have any plans for the future yet, except to see my wife, mother, sons and friends and family—people I haven't seen in three years, or 39 months, and together talk about things like that. About the future.

organization that is believed include Islamic Jihad for the Liberation of Palestine and other hostage holding groups.

Polhill's release apparently signals that the pro-Rafsanjani faction at least temporarily, gained the upper hand.

Syria, which has 40,000 troops in Lebanon, helped obtain the New Yorker's freedom because of Assad's desire to see improved ties with the United States. Syria has not isolated itself because of the pressure of its Communist allies in Eastern Europe last fall and because of changes in Soviet foreign policy. Although its ties with Moscow remain close, Syria may not be able to count on the military support of the Soviet Union.

Bush Expresses Good Will

Reuter

Excerpts from President Bush's news conference after the release of hostage Robert Polhill:

... Is this the sort of gesture from Iran, of good will from Iran . . . ?

I'm not looking for gestures. I'm looking for the release of our hostages. And by our hostages, I mean all of them. But in terms of good will, I must say in my heart I have good will towards Syria for playing an active role in this release. . . .

from the hostage families. It's very important to me that we do, because I want them to know exactly how much anxiety I feel about their loved ones still being held, but we're not going to change our policy, and we are going to say that we're grateful to those that facilitate the return of Mr. Polhill, but there are seven other Americans that are held against their will. . . .

... Do you also hold the Iranians responsible for the other seven hostages?

I'm not, I don't want to assign

IN CAPTIVITY

U.S. HOSTAGES IN LEBANON

■ **Terry Anderson**, chief Middle East correspondent for the Associated Press, kidnapped March 16, 1985, in West Beirut.

■ **Thomas Sutherland**, acting dean of agriculture at the American University of Beirut, June 9, 1985.

■ **Frank Herbert Reed**, American director of the Lebanese International School, Sept. 9, 1986.

■ **Joseph James Cicippio**, acting comptroller at the American University of Bei-

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