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1 August 1980

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Palestinian Presence in Iran

The Palestine Liberation Organization is one of Iran's few close allies. PLO Chief Arafat was the first foreign leader to visit Iran after the fall of the Shah and Ayatollah Khomeini was one of the earliest backers of Arafat's Fatah Organization. Many of Khomeini's closest supporters, including Foreign Minister Ghotbzadeh, have long had ties to the PLO. [Redacted]

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Since the revolution there have been numerous rumors about the extent of the Palestinian presence in Iran. Former Prime Minister Bakhtiar, for example, recently claimed that there are over 20,000 Palestinian advisers in Iran. Other opponents of the Khomeini government have charged that Palestinians pilot Iranian aircraft or are present among the militants holding the US Embassy. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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however, indicates that the PLO presence in Iran is relatively limited. The Khomeini regime appears to have made a determined effort to keep the PLO presence small in order to prevent the Palestinians from playing a significant role in Iran's internal affairs. [Redacted]

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The PLO's military presence in Iran is illustrative of its overall role. Shortly after the revolution Khomeini invited the PLO to help train the Revolutionary Guards. A PLO mission was dispatched to Tehran but apparently played little role in the formation of the Guards because many Iranian officials including regular military officers feared that the Palestinians would gain too much influence in the Iranian military. [Redacted] only about a half a dozen PLO military advisers remain in Tehran attached to the Guards. [Redacted]

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This memorandum was prepared by [Redacted] the Southwest Asia Analytic Center, Near East South Asia Division, Office of Political Analysis. Comments or queries may be addressed to Deputy Chief, Southwest Asia Analytic Center

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The PLO's main presence is in Tehran. Khomeini gave the PLO immediately after the revolution an office building that formerly housed Israel's diplomatic mission in Iran. The PLO office is accorded the status of an embassy by the Tehran government and includes a military attache, press offices for the Palestine News Agency (Wafa) and a few intelligence officers. The PLO is currently represented in Iran by a charge d'affairs, Ghazi al-Husaini who is a member of Fatah. Another Fatah official, Hani al-Hassan, is nominally head of the PLO presence in Iran, but he has been absent from the country for most of this year. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

The PLO also has small information offices in several other Iranian cities including Mashhad, Shiraz, Ahvaz, and Esfahan, but these are reportedly closely monitored by the Iranians. These offices reportedly recruit Iranian volunteers to fight in Lebanon with the fedayeen. [REDACTED]

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The office in Ahvaz in Khuzestan province is apparently very closely watched because Khuzestan has long been a target of Iraqi subversion and has a large Arab population. The Khomeini regime is sensitive to any Palestinian contact with the anti-government groups in the area. [REDACTED]

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The PLO presence in Iran is dominated by Arafat's Fatah group which has sought to prevent other Palestinian organizations from gaining a position in the country. Fatah officials believe, however, that the radical Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine has some personnel in Khuzestan. The PFLP and its Marxist counterpart, the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, have long had contact with various leftist Iranian groups like the Tudeh Party and the Fedayeen guerrillas--contacts which almost certainly have been maintained since the revolution. [REDACTED]

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