



file
SYRIA-PLO: Reining in Arafat

President Assad is attempting to weaken PLO leader Arafat's control over the Palestinian movement and align him more closely with Syria. [REDACTED]

Assad is upset with Arafat for not consulting Damascus in advance on key matters such as accepting the cease-fire in Lebanon in July and his discussions with French Foreign Minister Cheysson in Beirut last month. Even before the Cheysson visit, Assad showed his displeasure by ordering Arafat to close several Fatah offices in Syria. Now, [REDACTED] Assad has threatened to stop indefinitely all arms shipments through Syria for the PLO in Lebanon--a move that would deny the Palestinians their principal conduit for military supplies. [REDACTED]

Damascus is also tightening its control over the pro-Syrian Saiga Palestinian organization and encouraging the smaller groups within the PLO to oppose Arafat's free-wheeling behavior. [REDACTED] the Syrians are encouraging Fatah dissident Abu Nidal to stage terrorist operations to discredit Arafat and undermine his policy of limiting such operations to Israel and the Israeli-occupied territories. [REDACTED]

The Syrians fear that Arafat, left unchecked, might find a way to open a dialogue with the US and with moderate Arabs on the Palestinian question, without reference to Syria. They are determined to bring the PLO under Syrian control, because they view their leverage over the Palestinians as the principal bargaining chip in any future negotiations for the return of the Golan Heights. [REDACTED]

Arafat has sought to preserve his room for maneuver by moving some military assets in Lebanon to areas outside Syrian control and by stressing the PLO's intention to continue importing arms through Lebanese ports.

[REDACTED] Arafat hopes to counter Syrian political pressure by drawing closer to [REDACTED] Arafat's Fatah group, moreover, has contacts with Syrian dissidents and, if relations deteriorate further, could aid the anti-Assad Syrians. [REDACTED]