

The Director of Central Intelligence

Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

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20 July 1983

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence  
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

VIA: Chairman, National Intelligence Council

FROM: Constantine C. Menges  
National Intelligence Officer for Political Paramilitary  
Threats

SUBJECT: The President's Comments on the PLO and Central America,  
20 July 1983

1. The President met with Ambassador Whittelsey's group this morning and emphasized the following in his public remarks:

- We have documented a long history of Cuba/PLO Sandinista cooperation on behalf of violence and terrorism.
- The Sandinistas have persecuted the Jewish Community in Nicaragua, attacked their synagogues, frightened the Jewish Community out of Nicaragua and have declared themselves to be enemies of Israel, as well as the United States.
- Current US policy, if supported by the public, will prevent violent minorities from bringing communism to Central America.

2. The White House also issued a brief paper laying out the facts: PLO in Central America (9 pages).

  
Constantine C. Menges



C 352

# WHITE HOUSE DIGEST

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## THE PLO IN CENTRAL AMERICA

The Palestine Liberation Organization is an active ally of Communist revolutionaries throughout Central America. The PLO supplied training and materiel for the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua, and is still supplying military aid and advisors to the Communist Sandinista government. For their part, Sandinista revolutionaries were fighting beside their PLO comrades in the Middle East as early as 1970, are anti-Semitic and are dedicated to the destruction of Israel.

Right now, the PLO is giving the Salvadoran Communists the same sort of help. Since the late 1960s, the PLO has been working with Fidel Castro and his network of Latin American revolutionaries and has developed ties to revolutionary organizations in a number of Latin American countries.

## "BLOOD UNITY"

Though this alliance has received little attention in the press, neither the PLO nor its Latin Communist allies trouble to deny it. On June 7, 1979, six weeks before the

- 2 -

Sandinistas came to power, Sandinista press spokesman Jorge Mandi delivered a particularly strong testimonial to the alliance:

There is a longstanding blood unity between us and the Palestinians. Many of the units belonging to the Sandinista movements were at Palestinian revolutionary bases in Jordan. In the early 1970s, Nicaraguan and Palestinian blood was spilled together in Amman and in other places during the Black September Battles.

.....

It is natural therefore, that in our war against Somoza, we received Palestinian aid for our revolution in various forms.

Mandi also made it clear that the Sandinistas had participated in PLO terrorist acts such as hijacking.<sup>1</sup>

#### START WITH CUBA

Cuba has been the great organizing center and supply depot for Communist revolution in Central America. Fidel Castro introduced the PLO into the region and has vigorously promoted and supported the PLO's activities there.

Until the mid-1960s, Castro supported Israel. But, in 1966, Castro sponsored the First Conference of the Organization of Solidarity of the Peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, bringing together revolutionary leaders from three continents in order to get them to work together.

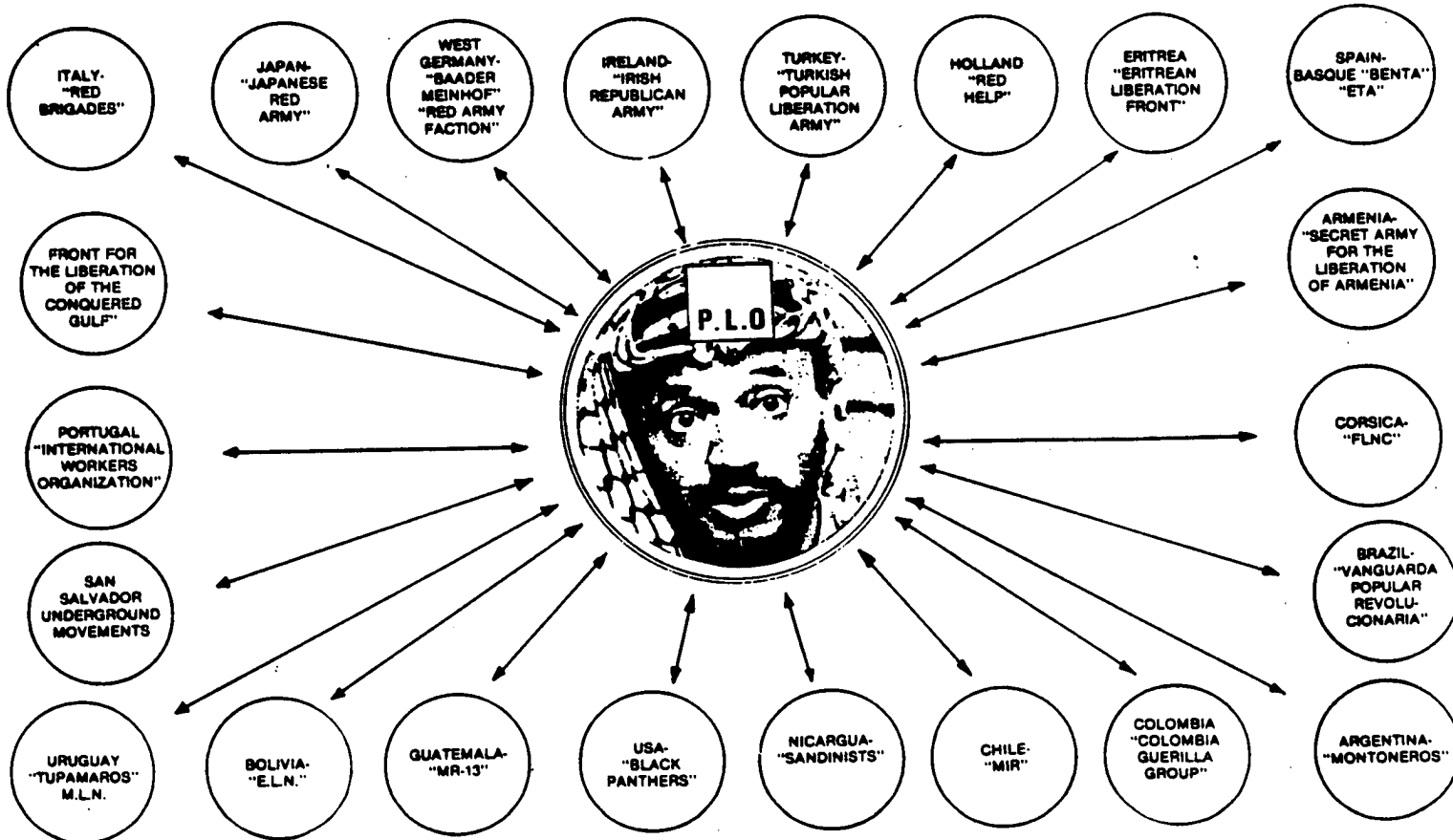
PLO representatives attended, and Castro began efforts to make the PLO a part of international revolutionary activities, especially in Latin America.

By 1968, Cuban intelligence and military personnel were assisting the PLO in North Africa and Iraq. By 1969,

Cuban officers were in joint training with PLO officers in the U.S.S.R. In June 1969, Cubans from that training class participated in a joint raid with the PLO in the Sinai desert.<sup>2</sup>

In 1972, Castro met with PLO leaders in Algeria and the two sides agreed to step up their joint activities.<sup>3</sup> The PLO undertook to augment Cuban training of Latin American terrorists with specialized training in Lebanon, South Yemen, and Libya. In 1973, Castro broke relations with Israel. Cuba had become one of Israel's most dedicated enemies. In 1974, the PLO opened its first Latin American office in Havana.<sup>4</sup>

Since being introduced to the region by Castro, the PLO has developed ties with revolutionary groups in nearly half the countries in the region.



Intelligence information has linked the PLO with terrorist and guerrilla organizations around the world.

- 4 -

THE NICARAGUA CONNECTION

Cooperation between the Sandinistas and the PLO goes back at least to 1969, seven or eight years before most Americans had heard of the Sandinistas. That year, some 50 Sandinista guerrillas went to Tyre for training under the PLO.<sup>5</sup> Other Sandinistas went to train in terror at PLO camps in Algeria.<sup>6</sup>

The Sandinista terrorists fit right in with their PLO counterparts. It has been reported that Pedro Arauz, a Sandinista who had hijacked a Nicaraguan airliner in 1969, trained under the PLO in 1970.<sup>7</sup> As the quote from Jorge Mandi makes clear, Sandinista troops fought beside the PLO against King Hussein of Jordan in 1970.<sup>8</sup>

Thomas Borge, Interior Minister of the Sandinista regime, has confirmed that he and other Sandinist-leaders were trained by Al Fatah, the leading PLO group, prior to 1970. Borge repeatedly spent much of the early '70s working for Castro, and was frequently in the Middle East, where he used Libyan money and PLO assistance to obtain arms for Central American guerrilla movements.<sup>9</sup>

The first official confirmation of the PLO-Sandinista alliance came in February 1978. The two groups issued a joint communique in Mexico City that affirmed the "ties of solidarity" existing between the two revolutionary organizations. They were united in their hatred of what they called the "racist state of Israel."

In a similar incident in March of 1978, the Sandinistas went so far as to join the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine in a joint "declaration of war" against Israel.

As the Sandinistas became more confident of victory, PLO aid became more concrete. Early in 1979, shortly before the

- 5 -

final Sandinista victory, the PLO sent an arms shipment to the Sandinistas but it was intercepted by the government of Morocco.<sup>10</sup> During the final weeks of the revolution, several large shipments of arms arrived from the Middle East.<sup>11</sup> According to one source, Thomas Borge arranged for a shipment of guns to be sent from North Korea on a ship owned and operated by the PLO.<sup>12</sup>

Within two weeks of the Sandinista victory in July 1979, the Sandinistas sent a mission to Beirut to establish official contacts with the PLO. The PLO facilitated a \$12 million loan to the Sandinistas.<sup>13</sup> Today, Nicaragua is one of the few countries in the world where the PLO mission is officially designated as an Embassy and the ranking PLO official is referred to as "Ambassador" -- a testimony to the importance the Sandinistas attach to their PLO connections.

#### THE STORMS OF REVOLUTION

In 1980, on the first anniversary of the Sandinista Communist takeover, Yasser Arafat came to Managua as an honored guest. Thomas Borge proclaimed, "the PLO cause is the cause of the Sandinistas." And Arafat replied, "the links between us are not new; your comrades did not come to our country just to train, but to fight. . . .Your enemies are our enemies."<sup>14</sup>

The PLO information bulletin, Palestine, commented:

There is no doubt there is a common line between Nicaragua, Iran, and Palestine. A common front against a common enemy. . . .

The Palestinian revolution understands the international dimensions of its struggle and its international task of supporting, within its capabilities,<sup>15</sup> international liberation movements.

- 6 -

Current estimates suggest that there are about 50 PLO personnel in Nicaragua. Some are involved in training Sandinista military in the use of Eastern Bloc weapons, some training pilots and flying helicopters, maintaining aircraft and training Salvadoran guerrillas to export Communist terror to that country.

#### IN EL SALVADOR

There is also a strong alliance between the PLO and the Salvadoran Communist guerrillas. The Salvadoran Communists, like the Sandinistas, share the PLO's fierce opposition to Israel.

One of the first clear signs of sympathy between the two groups emerged when one of the major Salvadoran Communist guerrilla groups, the Popular Liberation Forces (FPL) kidnapped and murdered the South African Ambassador to El Salvador. The FPL demanded, as part of the ransom, that the Salvadoran government break relations with Israel and establish official relations with the PLO.

Just a month later, the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), another Salvadoran communist guerrilla group, bombed the Israeli embassy in San Salvador to show "solidarity with the Palestinian people," and demanded that the government recognize the PLO.

In May 1980, a delegation from Revolutionary Coordination of the Masses (CRM), the unified political front for all the important Salvadoran Communist groups, met in Beirut with one of Yasser Arafat's deputies, Abu Jihad, and with George Habash, head of the terrorist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and arrived at agreements for training programs and arms purchases. The first group of Salvadoran trainees finished a "course" in PLO-style terrorism at an Al Fatah camp in June, 1980.<sup>16</sup>

- 7 -

On July 23, 1980 representatives of the Salvadoran United Revolutionary Directorate (DRU) which was then the unified military command for the various Salvadoran Communist groups, met with Arafat in Managua. Arafat promised them arms and aircraft.<sup>17</sup> Later in the year, Arafat did send some arms to the DRU,<sup>18</sup> and according to published reports, PLO fighters were sent to El Salvador in September.<sup>19</sup>

The alliance picked up steam in 1981. In March, Shafik Handal, a Salvadoran of Palestinian descent and head of El Salvador's Communist Party, met with Arafat and representatives of Habash's Popular Front in Lebanon. The meeting resulted in a joint communique that, among other points, included an agreement to continue cooperation between the unified Salvadoran guerrilla groups and Habash's group.<sup>20</sup>

By early 1981, according to Congressional testimony from Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs John Bushnell, there had been "a massive influx of arms from Soviet and other Communist sources. Radical Arab states and the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the terrorist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine have furnished funds, arms, and training.

In January 1982, Arafat said publicly that PLO guerrillas were serving in El Salvador.<sup>21</sup> And documents captured in Beirut during the summer of 1982 reveal that there were Salvadoran guerrillas in PLO camps in Lebanon.

#### THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

Though these fragments of information have left a clear trail, even without them there would be no doubt about the relationship between the Central American Communists and PLO terror, because both sides have loudly proclaimed it. In 1981, Yasser Arafat spoke in words too clear to be mis-



- 8 -

understood or explained away:

We are a great revolution that can never be intimidated. We have connections with all the revolutionary movements throughout the world, in El Salvador, in Nicaragua -- and I reiterate Salvador<sup>22</sup>-- and elsewhere in the world.

FOOTNOTES

1. Al Watan (Kuwaiti newspaper) June 7, 1979.
2. Palestine (PLO Information Bulletin), June, 1980.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Hadar, The Jerusalem Post, August 14, 1981.
6. Washington Post, July 12, 1979.
7. Bell, Human Events, November 25, 1978.
8. Israeli Defense Force paper, "Report -- The PLO and International Terror," March 1981.
9. Newsletter, Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs, June, 1983.
10. State Department paper, "Communist, PLO and Libyan Support for Nicaragua and the Salvadoran Insurgents." May 25, 1983.
11. U.S. News and World Report, September 1, 1980.
12. Op. cit., Hadar.
13. London Daily Telegraph, December 2, 1981.
14. Op. cit., Israeli Defense Force
15. Palestine, July 16-31, 1980.

- 9 -

16. Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs Briefing, May 16, 1982.
17. U.S. Department of State Special Report #30, Feb. 23, 1981.
18. Op. cit., Israeli Ministry.
19. Op. cit., U.S. News.
20. Op. cit., Israeli Ministry.
21. Op. cit., Palestine, July 16-30, 1980.
22. Associated Press, April 14, 1981.