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SUBJECT: The PLO Offices in Tunis and Amman: Possible Roles,
Links and Conduct in Fatah Operations

NESA M#85-10216

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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

30 October 1985

The PLO Offices in Tunis and Amman:
Possible Roles, Links and Conduct in Fatah Operations



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Key Judgments

Fatah's involvement in recent Palestinian attacks against Israel and the possibility that Fatah may attack US targets raises questions regarding the functions and activities of the PLO/Fatah offices in Tunis and Amman. Israeli political leaders [redacted] claim that PLO facilities in Tunis and Amman have been used for the planning and directing of Fatah terrorist operations. [redacted]

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We have little hard information on which to make conclusive judgments regarding any link the PLO offices in Tunis and Amman may have with recent Fatah-directed or inspired terrorist operations. Our best estimates are based upon what we surmise from [redacted]

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[redacted] the October Israeli airstrike on the PLO headquarters in Tunis and the Achille Lauro terrorist operation. [redacted]

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. Information as of 30 October 1985 was used in its preparation. Questions and comments should be directed to Chief, Arab-Israeli Division, [redacted]

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We believe that the governments of Tunisia and Jordan, while supportive of the Palestinian cause, are fully aware of the political and military implications if either host serves as a staging ground for PLO/Fatah-mounted terrorist operations, particularly against Israel. We do not believe, however, that either has adequate manpower or technical resources to fully monitor and control all PLO activity within their borders.

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PLO Headquarters, Tunis

PLO/Fatah offices in Tunis have served essentially as the PLO's "capital" since its departure from Lebanon, primarily handling routine administrative matters. There apparently have been two main complexes in Tunis; one administrative office located downtown and the beach hotel in the suburb of Hamman, hit in the Israeli raid, where PLO officers were resident and presumably held meetings. Palestinian fighters are located about 70 kilometers southwest of Tunis at Oued Zarga. [redacted] there are only about 100-150 fighters at the camp and many of them are preparing for transfer to Iraq. [redacted] camp morale has been low because the fighters have little to do--there is no military training--and they are not allowed to travel into town because of problems with the local population. [redacted]

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We believe Palestinians in Tunis have abided by the restrictions laid down by local authorities against initiating any terrorist activities from Tunisia. [redacted]

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[redacted] we assess that Tunis has not been a center for the planning and directing of PLO/Fatah terrorist operations, even though the PLO's chief security official and head of the United Security Organization, Salah Khalaf, is based in Tunis. Fatah's Force 17 also had an office in Tunis, although its headquarters is in Amman. Muhammad Abbas's faction of the Palestine Liberation Front, which has been associated with Arafat, apparently planned the recent Achille Lauro operation from Tunis. We cannot confirm, however, that Arafat had any foreknowledge of the specifics of this operation. [redacted]

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The PLO's need to reestablish its headquarters and recover from its physical losses following the departure from Lebanon in 1982 initially preoccupied senior PLO officials in Tunis. Even after the PLO settled in during 1983, the isolation of the PLO headquarters and Fatah offices in Tunis seems to have severely

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[redacted]

complicated and slowed all Fatah decisionmaking, including planning operations against Israel.* [redacted]

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Nevertheless, we believe senior PLO officials in Tunis have probably known in general terms of activities planned by Fatah operatives against Israeli or anti-Arafat Palestinians. We believe that Fatah security officials have been careful to use bases in other countries to mount operations. [redacted]

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[redacted] we believe that Khalaf uses his security organization's office in East Germany for most operational activities. The Force 17 facility in Tunis may have planned a Fatah operation in West Berlin last January against pro-Syrian Palestinians or Syrian officials there, but the operation was headed off when the West Germans arrested the Palestinian suspect and extradited him to Tunis. [redacted]

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[redacted]

[redacted] Force 17 members appear to be most active in Lebanon, Greece, and Cyprus. [redacted]

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Force 17 was responsible for the murder of three Israeli yachtsmen in Larnaca in late September. [redacted]

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PLO Offices, Amman

The number of PLO offices in Jordan has increased considerably since November 1984, primarily because Arafat wanted to move offices out of Damascus after alienating the Syrians and radical Palestinians with his decision to convene the Palestine National Council in Amman. The two largest offices to be transferred from Damascus to Amman were the headquarters of the PNC and the Palestine National Fund. [redacted]

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Palestinian military personnel in Jordan are divided into four distinct groups. The first three groups have maintained a presence in Jordan for many years:

- The Palestine National Liberation Army forces usually called the Badr Brigade
- Fatah Force 17, the organization's security service
- Khaliq Wazir's Western Sector Department

The fourth group includes almost 1000 fighters stationed at a new PLO training camp in Khaw near the PNLA camp. Among these fighters are pro-Arafat forces who were forced out of Lebanon during the fighting with Palestinian rebels two years ago and

* During this period, Fatah fighters reportedly undertook military training in Algeria and transited Tunis on their way to Lebanon via Cyprus. [redacted]

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[Redacted]

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approximately 200 Palestinians who came to Jordan from Libya following the May Israeli/Palestinian prisoner exchange. [Redacted]

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We believe King Hussein permitted the PLO to transfer some facilities to Amman despite his distrust of the PLO because he wanted to encourage Arafat to cooperate in an effort to move toward peace negotiations with Israel. Hussein also wants to preserve good relations with Jordan's Palestinian majority by showing support for Arafat. [Redacted]

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At the same time, the PLO's increased presence in Amman has complicated Hussein's position with Israel. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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The Israelis believe the Western Sector is the PLO's main operational apparatus in Amman for directing terrorist activities on the West Bank. [Redacted]

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We believe that the Jordanians closely monitor PLO and Fatah activities in Jordan, probably through the use of surveillance, telephone taps, and informers. Jordan recently expelled Fatah's Force 17 Commander, Mahmud al-Natur (Abu Tayyib) and possibly as many as 36 Western Sector officials as a precautionary measure to minimize the prospect of Israeli reprisals against Palestinian targets in Jordan. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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Despite what we believe to be stringent Jordanian efforts to restrict activities, it is probable that Western Sector operatives may have been behind some recent attacks against Israelis. They apparently have used their increased contacts with West Bank Palestinians visiting Jordan to encourage operations in the territories. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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[Redacted] Israeli officials also have told US Embassy officers that they believe the bulk of West Bank violence is the result of Palestinians acting on their own. [Redacted]

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Israel's Views

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Israel has been consistent in public [Redacted] in reporting what it perceives as evidence of direct links between the PLO offices in Amman and Tunis and Fatah-directed acts of Palestinian terrorism against Israel. Although most of Israel's verbal attacks have been aimed at the PLO presence in Jordan, it alleges that the squad the Israelis arrested last August from the vessel Casselardit, traveling from Cyprus to Lebanon, was directed from Tunis and had a final mission of attacking a bus in northern Israel. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

[Redacted] Israeli Prime Minister Peres and Defense Minister Rabin have stated that their approval for the raid against PLO headquarters in Tunis was based on evidence they believed showed that Fatah Force 17 directed the Larnaca terrorist attack from Tunis. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

Outlook

Despite the risks, Fatah is likely to try to retaliate against Israel--and possibly the US--in the wake of the Israeli raid on PLO headquarters in Tunis and the US interception of the Achille Lauro hijackers. Arafat's security chiefs will press for more frequent and spectacular operations. We believe Arafat, who is aware of the political implications for his hosts, may urge restraint until Fatah can carry out an attack that cannot be traced to operatives in either Tunis or Amman. [Redacted]

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