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SUBJECT: Israeli Capabilities for Striking PLO Bases

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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

20 December 1985

Israeli Capabilities for Striking PLO Bases

Summary

Israel has the capability to strike any major PLO facility in the Middle East and North Africa using F-15 fighter aircraft. The Israelis could also use submarines or their large missile boats to deliver seaborne commandos for attacks on facilities on or near the coast anywhere in the Mediterranean Sea. Naval combatants, however, would have to move through the Suez Canal into the Red Sea to operate against targets on the Arabian Peninsula. PLO targets in Jordan could be hit by ground units or by helicopter-borne troops.

[Redacted]

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The PLO bases in or near Sanaa in North Yemen--1,100 nautical miles from southern Israel--would be particularly likely targets for a reprisal air raid because Fatah terrorists have trained there and because North Yemen has weak air defenses. The PLO base at Tebessa in Algeria--1,350 nautical miles from Tel Aviv--would be an inviting air target for the same reasons. Recently, about 500 PLO fighters have moved to a camp in Sudan--675 nautical miles from southern Israel--bringing the number of fighters at the facility possibly as high as 700. The relatively short distance of this camp from Israel and its weak air defenses may also make it an inviting target. The Peres Government almost certainly would strike at PLO targets in Jordan if Israel suffered an unusually destructive terrorist attack

This memorandum was prepared by [Redacted] of the Israel-Jordan-Palestinian Branch, Arab-Israeli Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis; and [Redacted] the Near East Branch of OIA/TWED. Information as of 16 December 1985 was used in its preparation. Questions and comments should be directed to Chief, Arab-Israeli Division, [Redacted]

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or a series of smaller operations directed from Jordanian territory. [REDACTED]

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The PLO has offices in 85 countries, but since the expulsion of PLO fighters from Beirut in 1982, the organization's military forces have been concentrated at bases in Algeria, North and South Yemen, Tunisia, Iraq, Jordan, and, most recently, Sudan (see the accompanying map). Fighters associated with pro-Damascus Palestinian groups remain in Lebanon and Syria, and Fatah fighters have gradually filtered back to Lebanon's major cities. (Descriptions of major PLO facilities in the Middle East and North Africa are at Annex.) [REDACTED]

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### Israeli Strike Capabilities

Israel's military has the capability to strike any PLO facility in the Middle East (including the Arabian Peninsula) and North Africa. [REDACTED]

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Air Force Using F-15Cs or F-15Ds flying a high-low-high mission profile and supported by its two KC-707 aerial refueling tankers, the Israeli air force probably could strike even the most distant of PLO bases--the camps in Algeria, North Yemen, and South Yemen--with as many as 18-20 aircraft. Flying a low-low-high mission profile to avoid radar detection would consume a much greater amount of fuel and would require a substantial reduction in the number of strike aircraft. When attacking targets in Iraq or Jordan, the Israelis could use aircraft with shorter range, such as their F-16s, F-4s, or Kfirs, and stage much larger raids. [REDACTED]

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Navy Israel's navy has the technical capability to land naval commando teams as far away as Algeria or the Yemens. These commandos could operate either from Gal class submarines or the Aliya or Ramat class missile-armed patrol boats, but would be of use only against facilities located near the coast, such as the recently destroyed complex in Tunis or the now abandoned PLO

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\* In reaching this assessment, we assume that the F-15C/Ds would be supported by two KC-707s that each could provide the raiders with at least 110,000 pounds of fuel. Some of these aircraft probably would carry GBU-15s, which are 2,000-pound glide bombs guided by a television seeker system. Others probably would carry Mark 82 500-pound "iron bombs." All probably would be armed with Sparrow and Sidewinder air-to-air missiles, and all would carry conformal fuel tanks and as many wing or belly tanks as would be compatible with the specific ordnance load. We assume further that the strike force would travel to and from a target at a relatively high altitude (e.g., 30,000 feet) and at a constant cruising speed (e.g., 500 knots). [REDACTED]

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facility on Kamaran Island, North Yemen. Naval combatants, however, would have to move through the Suez Canal into the Red Sea to operate against targets on the Arabian Peninsula. 

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Army Israel's army could strike deep into Jordan using elite helicopter-borne forces or regular ground troops. The Israelis have the capability to insert about four battalions of infantry in a one-time helicopter lift. By using such forces, however, the Israelis would largely sacrifice the element of surprise provided by an airstrike. Even if ground troops or helicopter-borne soldiers achieved tactical surprise, they would remain vulnerable to retaliatory attack. Consequently, such units would require extensive protective aircover. 

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Outlook

Peres probably will continue to rule out raids against PLO targets in Jordan unless Arafat's forces there are clearly linked to a highly destructive terrorist raid or a series of smaller operations in Israel or the West Bank. King Hussein already has imposed new restrictions on PLO activities in Jordan and has forced some radical Palestinians to leave the country. Peres almost certainly calculates that Hussein will crack down further on the PLO if the organization becomes embroiled in another incident such as the Achille Lauro affair. [REDACTED]

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Although the Tunis raid has encouraged other Arab states to increase their alert levels, Israel probably could still mount an operation against the PLO in North Yemen, Algeria, or Sudan without unduly endangering its raiding force. The only factors that might cause the Israelis to reject a strike on the base in Sudan would be a fear of reprisals against the roughly 2,000 Ethiopian Jewish refugees still quartered in Sudan or fear of unduly angering Egypt. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] The PLO base at Tebessa in Algeria might be another inviting target because of Algeria's relatively weak air defense cover and the easy approach route over Tunisia. Given sufficient provocation, Israel might elect to attack PLO bases in Iraq, although the Israelis would have to accept a greater risk to its forces in such an operation because of Iraq's relatively dense air defenses. [REDACTED]

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Annex

North Yemen

[Redacted]

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The PLO's air assets--called Force 14--consist of a handful of helicopters and transport aircraft located at Sanaa International Airport, [Redacted]

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[Redacted] PLO aircraft are mixed in with Yemeni civilian and military aircraft, making them a difficult target for a raiding force. The airport is defended by obsolescent SA-2 SAMs and AAA, and the SA-2s are not supported by an effective air defense radar network. The North Yemenis recently received SA-3s, but these missiles probably will not become operational for several months. [Redacted]

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North Yemen's air force has an extremely limited capability to defend its airspace with fighter aircraft. The most effective unit in the air force is an F-5 squadron, but North Yemen's pilots have not been well trained for air-to-air combat. [Redacted]

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Until recently, the PLO had a small naval detachment based on Kamaran Island near Hudaydah, where Israel feared they could stage raids against Israeli ships in the Red Sea. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

The PLO also maintains a detachment of fighters in Hudaydah, but they are not located at an easily identifiable facility. Hudaydah, like the Sanaa area, is protected by SA-2s and AAA. [Redacted]

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Algeria

The PLO maintains a regional military command in Algeria, and its main base is located at Tebessa--approximately 1,350 nautical miles from Tel Aviv. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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Newly installed air defense equipment has been observed at Tebessa. Two six-position anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) sites and two four-position SA-7 short-range surface-to-air missile (SAM)

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sites--presumably operated by the Algerians--have been constructed there since late October. Additionally, the fighters may be armed with individual SA-7s. [redacted]

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Even so, the PLO fighters would undoubtedly depend heavily on support from the Algerian air force for defense. Algerian air defense units are equipped with modern Soviet interceptors, supported by a fairly extensive radar network that is situated to protect the western region of the country and coastal areas. Tebessa, however, is not well covered by this network or by Algerian SAM units and could be approached by flying across weakly defended Tunisian airspace. [redacted]

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PLO fighters have also received armor, artillery, air defense, and amphibious warfare training from Algerian instructors at several Algerian bases around the country, [redacted]

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[redacted] These fighters received their training at a center at Arzew, about 100 nautical miles east of the Moroccan border. Like other Algerian bases, the Arzew facility probably has no permanent Palestinian presence, making it a less suitable target for the Israelis than Tebessa. Arzew, which is an important port, is defended by three SA-6 batteries and an antiaircraft artillery (AAA) battery. [redacted]

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### Sudan

[redacted] the number of fighters stationed at the camp possibly as high as 700. A few fighters may also be located at a small camp--called Sinkat--located nearby. The camp at Erkowit is protected only by six quadruple-mount 14.5-mm antiaircraft machine guns and, possibly, SA-7s. Sudanese air defenses are virtually nonexistent. The Sudanese have no operational air defense missiles, no early-warning radar network, and no skilled pilots to fly their handful of MiG-21s. [redacted]

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### South Yemen

After the PLO's expulsion from Beirut, the organization may have sent about 1,000 mostly Fatah fighters to camps near Aden in South Yemen--1,200 nautical miles from southern Israel--and established a regional command there. By the end of last summer, however, most of these men had departed for Iraq. [redacted]

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[redacted] The South Yemeni Air Force operates two fighter squadrons equipped with MiG-21s, but its pilots are untested in combat and not considered particularly proficient. South Yemen has several Soviet pilot-advisers, but they probably would not be available for use against the Israelis. [redacted]

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Iraq

The PLO maintains several offices in Baghdad, including the headquarters of a regional command, but the main PLO camp in Iraq is located at Al Musayyib, about 25 nautical miles south of Baghdad--about 475 nautical miles from Israel. The camp was built to house between 1,000 and 2,000 persons, but the recent influx of Fatah fighters from Tunisia and South Yemen may have pushed the occupancy figure as high as 2,500. Although no air defenses are visible at the camp, several light AAA pieces are located at a nearby Iraqi facility. Fighters at the camp may be armed with SA-7s or similar short-range air defense weapons, and five Iraqi SA-6 battalions and an SA-3 battalion are located about 30 nautical miles of the camp. [REDACTED]

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Iraq's air defense forces, which include hundreds of SA-2, SA-3, SA-6, SA-8, SA-13, and Roland SAM launchers and 18 fighter-interceptor squadrons, are improving, although they have not been able to prevent intruders from overflying their country. Moreover, even though Iraq is wary of Israeli raids in the wake of the attack on its Tuwaitha reactors in 1981 and the recent raid on Tunis, Iraq's principal concern is Iran. Consequently, most air defense forces are focused toward the east, not the west. Still, the density of Iraqi air defenses and cooperative efforts among Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Iraq in trading air defense information imposes risks for would-be Israeli raiders. [REDACTED]

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Tunisia

The devastating Israeli raid last October on the PLO political headquarters in Tunis--1,200 nautical miles from Israel--destroyed most of the complex and inflicted more than 200 casualties. [REDACTED]

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Tunisian air defenses, as the Tunis raid made abundantly clear, are weak. If the Israelis chose to strike the PLO in Tunis again in the near future, the Tunisians could not prevent them from doing so. [REDACTED]

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Jordan

The PLO maintains several administrative offices in Amman, including those of the Palestine National Council, the Palestine National Fund, the Voice of Palestine radio service, the headquarters of the Palestine National Liberation Army's Badr Brigade, the commander of Fatah Force 17, and the commander of

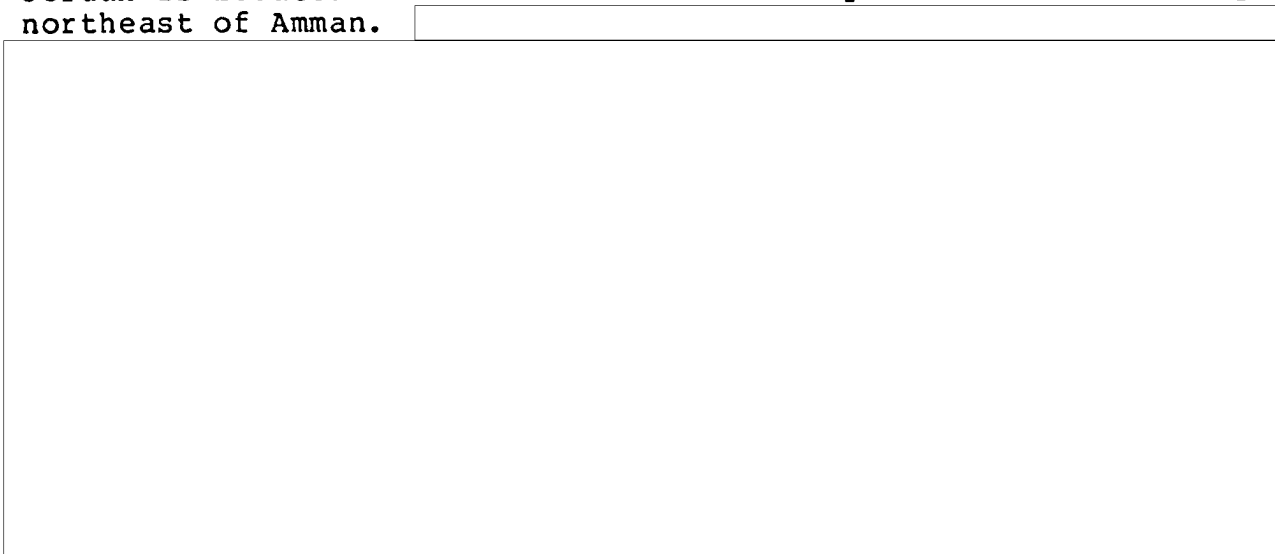


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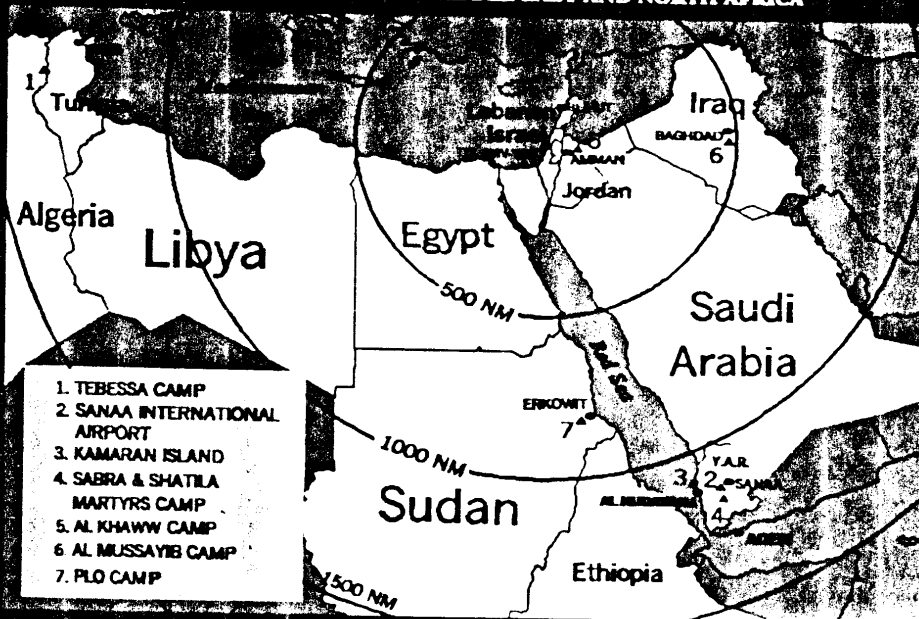
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Fatah's Western Sector Command. The main PLO military base in Jordan is located next to the Jordanian army barracks at Az Zarga northeast of Amman.



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**MAJOR PLO MILITARY TARGETS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA**



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