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**SUBJECT: The Impact of Unrest in the Israeli-Occupied Territories** [Redacted]

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Central Intelligence Agency



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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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The Impact of Unrest in the Israeli-Occupied Territories [Redacted]

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Summary

The spontaneous, broad-based Palestinian uprising underway in the West Bank and Gaza Strip since 9 December demonstrates that young Arabs in the occupied territories have decided to take their fate into their own hands. Although the PLO and some Islamic groups belatedly have attempted to assert a leadership role, the uprising remains essentially a grassroots, popular resistance lacking strong central leadership. Israel has been surprised by the intensity and duration of the unrest and has sought without success to suppress it. [Redacted]

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There are no signs that the violence will abate soon. The youthful Palestinian activists--bolstered by widespread international sympathy and the belief that they can drive the Israelis out--are determined to continue their uprising in the face of Israeli repression. The Likud bloc opposes significant concessions to the Arabs, and most Israelis are willing to commit large-scale military force to the territories despite the adverse impact a prolonged police role can have on the IDF's capabilities and readiness. [Redacted]

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Rather than winding down, the stage may be set for a marked increase in violence. The growing involvement by extremist Israeli settlers in clashes and increasing anti-Arab feelings by frustrated Israeli troops could be matched by a resort to arms by more militant Palestinians. [Redacted]

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Most Arab states are encouraged by the challenge to Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and welcome international pressure on Israel and renewed US activism in the Arab-Israeli peace process. Other Arab states, however, realize that the events in the territories are beyond their control or the control of the PLO, and worry about growing agitation among their own local or Palestinian populations. [Redacted]

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Palestinian unrest in the West Bank and Gaza since early December has reached an extent unprecedented in Israel's twenty-year occupation of the territories. The uncoordinated disturbances have featured widespread daily demonstrations, commercial strikes, stone throwings, firebombings, and isolated attempts to attack Israeli soldiers. The uprising erupted in early December in Gaza when rumors spread that a traffic accident in which an Israeli driver killed four Palestinians was a deliberate act of revenge for the murder of an Israeli shopping in Gaza the previous month. Palestinian violence occurred mostly in Gaza in December; since mid-January most of the trouble has been in the West Bank. Israeli Arab citizens also staged several demonstrations in Israel proper against the Israeli occupation as well as for left political groups such as Peace Now and the Israeli Communist Party.

Israel, slow to realize the magnitude of the problem, has attempted to stifle the unrest through harsh repressive measures. Since 9 December Israeli troops have killed at least 65 Palestinians, claiming that Israeli lives were endangered by mobs with stones, molotov cocktails, knives, and sticks. No Israeli soldiers or civilians have been killed in the disturbances.

In our view, the continuing outburst reflects years of pent-up frustration by large numbers of Palestinians in the territories, who since 1967 have been denied political self-expression and, especially in Gaza, lived in conditions of poverty and squalor. According to numerous reports, the protests--which spread from refugee camp to camp, from village to village--have been largely spontaneous, lacking any central or even regional leadership.

Since early January, Palestinian activists have sought to coordinate the disturbances, but these efforts have not achieved broad coordination of what remain mostly localized outbursts of unrest. The distribution of inflammatory leaflets and pamphlets attributed by the activists to a so-called "United Leadership for the Uprising in the Territories," have been the product of local committees within individual towns, villages, and camps, in our assessment. Even within the towns, villages, and refugee camps there appears

to be little coordination of activities among the many neighborhood committees. Palestinian radio broadcasts from outside the occupied territories exacerbate tensions between Palestinian factions rather than provide direction to Palestinians inside the occupied territories.

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The absence of a well-organized leadership with clear political demands will make it more difficult for Israel to negotiate with the Palestinians. The local Palestinians fueling the unrest have expressed few political sentiments beyond their desire to end Israeli occupation. They have not articulated a political platform nor raised interim demands with Israeli authorities. Although some pro-PLO intellectuals in East Jerusalem have called for civil disobedience, such as a boycott of Israeli products, they do not appear to be leading the masses in the streets.

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We have seen signs of friction between local groups of Palestinian activists. There appear to be growing strains over the past few weeks between rival PLO factions and between the Palestinian nationalists and Muslim fundamentalists. The fundamentalists--who have been especially active in inciting unrest in the more religiously conservative Gaza Strip--initially had succeeded in submerging long-standing rivalries with the secular Palestinian nationalists. Fatah activists, for their part, recently have become particularly upset by efforts of the more radical Ahmad Jibril group--the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine General Command--to label pro-Arafat Palestinians as Israeli collaborators in their "al-Quds" radio broadcasts from southern Syria.

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PLO Preempted

The PLO was caught by surprise by the unrest, according to US Embassy reporting and responded belatedly by trying to funnel assistance to Palestinians in the territories and claim credit for the disturbances. As late as January, PLO Chairman Arafat apparently did not believe he had a clear idea of what was going on in the territories. [redacted]

We believe that the primary goal of the PLO at this stage is to encourage West Bankers and Gazans to prolong the violence so that the Palestinian issue remains a priority item on the international agenda. At the same time, we believe the PLO leaders are alarmed by the prospect that their irrelevance to the unrest will undermine the PLO's claim to leadership of the Palestinians. [redacted]

In recent weeks, [redacted] Arafat has accelerated efforts to infiltrate money and small arms into the territories and has ordered Fatah activists to prolong the violence. He also has received plans and may have ordered PLO fighters in Lebanon to conduct anti-Israeli operations to reaffirm his and the PLO's revolutionary credentials and to increase pressure on the Israeli army. In our view, the PLO's effort to organize a dramatic "ship of return" to carry exiled Palestinians back to Israel is the organization's latest unsuccessful bid to claim leadership of the protest movement. [redacted]

Israeli Military and Political Reactions

Israel continues its two-track response of using firm measures to contain the unrest while considering proposals for Arab-Israeli negotiations. Polls conducted since the violence erupted in the territories show that over 60 percent of the Israeli public supports the strong measures taken by the Unity Government to handle the unrest. Before the disturbances broke out, polls by the respected Public Opinion Research of Israel (PORI) Organization indicated 51 percent of Israelis were willing to give up at least part of the West Bank and Gaza in exchange for peace with Arab neighbors. More recent surveys suggest that the violence has had little impact on Israeli readiness for territorial compromise. [redacted]

Israeli leaders from the start defined the unrest in the territories as a problem of law and order and reacted by steadily increasing the number of troops there and allowing liberal use of force. By the end of December, the number of troops had nearly tripled from the usual two thousand in the Gaza Strip. Forces were at least doubled in the West Bank, and in both places units among the elite Golani and Givati brigades were added to the normal border police and reservists. [redacted]

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Israel has employed a series of increasingly forceful steps to contain the unrest, which so far have not been effective except in Gaza, where most Palestinians are residents of easily isolated refugee camps. Tear gas, large-scale arrests, curfews, selected deportation of agitators, shootings, and beatings have been used by the Israelis, but to no avail. In our opinion, shooting deaths and indiscriminate beatings of Palestinians by the Israelis have aggravated Palestinian unrest. [redacted]

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By mid-February, when most violence had shifted to the West Bank, Israel was able to draw down its troop presence in Gaza to near normal levels. In both the West Bank and Gaza, Israel has begun to replace regular troops with reservists in an attempt to minimize the impact of the disturbances on the standing army. [redacted]

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The division in Israel's Unity Government between the left-of-center Labor Party and the hardline Likud bloc continues to thwart political efforts that might assuage Palestinian frustrations. Reacting defensively to the latest US diplomatic efforts in the region, Prime Minister Shamir has continued to oppose international sponsorship of peace talks and setting a timetable for negotiations on a final settlement. [redacted]

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[redacted] Shamir's Likud bloc will support only strictly limited self-rule for Arabs in the territories. Likud's concept of autonomy would give Palestinians authority only in matters like education, health, and municipal services; Israel would control defense, settlement activity, and land and water resources. Such a limited version of autonomy would clearly be [redacted]

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impossible for any Palestinian interlocutor to accept. [Redacted]

unrest, which requires political action. [Redacted]

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Likud hardliners led by Ariel Sharon have reinforced Shamir's inclination not to agree to additional concessions. Sharon and Deputy Prime Minister David Levi, both major party rivals to Shamir, are threatening to challenge him for party leadership now if he agrees to more than limited autonomy. [Redacted]

Despite their reservations, Israeli commanders are determined to do whatever is necessary to restore order. Israeli Chief-of-Staff, Lieutenant General Dan Shomron, has publicly conceded that the military never prepared itself for such widespread violence in the occupied territories and has admitted deep frustration with the military's inability to cope with the unrest. Since the initial wave of disturbances, however, the Israeli military has sought to minimize the use of lethal force by encouraging the graduated use of forceful riot control measures, ranging from warnings through the use of tear gas, rubber bullets and water cannons, and eventually--when warranted--live ammunition. The last action, according to the US Embassy, also is graded to include firing warning shots in the air, firing at the legs of rioters, and finally lethal fire when troops believe they are in physical danger. [Redacted]

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Peres, leader of the Labor Party, has agreed to autonomy as a first step and--unlike Shamir--is willing to concede territory in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to secure a peace treaty with Jordan. Peres believes Arab-Israeli negotiations on peace are necessary to stop the violence in the occupied territories. Peres' earlier attempts to withdraw from the coalition government in protest against Shamir's belligerence failed when he proved unable to muster enough Knesset support to call for new elections. [Redacted]

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IDF Preparing for the Long-Haul

The Israeli military command, believing a political settlement is not imminent, is preparing for a long-term policing effort in the territories while striving to minimize strains on manpower and unit readiness. We assess that the Israeli military has suffered minimal erosion in its combat capabilities and readiness stemming from its deployment of troops to the territories.

The military has adopted other measures aimed both at limiting the number of shooting fatalities and at intimidating the population. Although highly controversial, the mass beatings policy was implemented by Defense Minister Rabin in early January to punish rioters directly and harshly in hopes of deterring other potential rioters. Besides beatings, other forms of collective punishment such as arrests, detentions, curfews, and midnight raids on homes of suspected agitators also have become standard tactics. [Redacted]

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--Israeli commanders, however, are frustrated by the seemingly unending nature of the unrest and fear the military will become increasingly entangled in a role for which it is ill-prepared and which they believe ultimately will detract from the military's mission to protect Israel against external threats, according to US Embassy reporting.

The military has admitted that excesses associated with the beatings have occurred but insists these are "deviations" and that transgressors will be disciplined. The military's concern about excesses has led it to dispatch army psychologists to the field to assess soldier behavior. Growing involvement by extremist Israeli settlers in clashes has added an explosive new element, and several Israeli papers report a growing trend of frustrated Israeli troops developing anti-Arab feelings and spoiling for a fight. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] that recent tactics undertaken in the occupied territories offer merely a short-term solution to the

The military leadership is attempting to lessen the adverse impact that prolonged occupation duty could have on combat performance, troop

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morale, and ability to maintain security along Israel's borders--particularly with Lebanon.

--Israel's ground forces commander recently stated that reserve units will continue to take over duties in the occupied territories from regular troops. [Redacted]

[Redacted] that a limited reserve mobilization is underway both in northern Israel and on the West Bank. The rotation into the territories of reservists inexperienced in police functions, however, could cause additional IDF overreactions, in our opinion. [Redacted]

--Amman and Cairo probably also fear that Palestinian extremists are uninterested in incremental diplomatic advances and will thwart progress by stepping up the violence. [Redacted]

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Arab regimes are more worried about growing agitation among their own large Palestinian populations, according to US Embassy reporting. Jordan, in particular, fears the violence is inflaming its Palestinian majority, many of whom have family ties to Palestinians living in the West Bank. Pro-Palestinian demonstrations have taken place in several Arab countries, and there have been violent clashes with local security forces. [Redacted]

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The View From Arab Capitals

We believe Arab leaders see the unrest as the most serious challenge so far to Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the beginning of a new era in populist Palestinian resistance. For most Arab states, the extensive international criticism of Israel's handling of the unrest, perceived strains in US-Israeli relations, and renewed US activism in the Arab-Israeli peace-seeking process have been welcome developments. [Redacted]

Moderate Arab leaders are concerned that the violence is distracting attention from the Iranian threat in the Persian Gulf, reducing chances that international pressure on Tehran will force an end to the war. They also fear that the disturbances might complicate their security cooperation with the United States. Syria, however, has welcomed the distraction, as it has helped relieve Arab pressure on it to move away from its pro-Iranian tilt in the Iran-Iraq war. [Redacted]

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Still, the Arabs are aware that events in the territories are beyond their control and even that of the PLO, and they appear uncertain about how to exploit the unrest. In our view, Arab leaders hope US pressure on Tel Aviv can ease Israel's forceful security practices in the territories and gain Likud acceptance of an international conference. No key Arab leader seems poised, at this point, to undertake a dramatic new initiative or to deviate from standard positions on a peace process as a result of the violence.

We believe Arab leaders are becoming increasingly concerned that the violence will sharply escalate and develop into a regional crisis. If the Palestinian death toll rose quickly to dramatic new levels or if Israel began deporting a large number of Palestinians into neighboring states, we believe Syria, Jordan, and Egypt would feel compelled to take tangible action against Israel. They would almost certainly try to calibrate their responses according to their national interests, however, and only secondarily to Palestinian and pan-Arab interests.

--Jordan and Egypt almost certainly are concerned that rising expectations and militancy among Palestinians living in the territories make it more difficult for PLO and other Palestinian leaders to make concessions required for movement.

--Egypt probably would reduce its trade and commercial relations with Israel before downgrading diplomatic ties. Cairo would work with Jordan to orchestrate international censure of Israel; Syria probably would opt to increase its support for Palestinian cross-border

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commando attacks from Lebanon into Israel.

--The chances of political miscalculations, dangerous emotional reactions, military missteps, and even military attacks would increase if the security situation in the territories deteriorated dramatically.

Outlook

We believe that the outlook for the occupied territories for the next several months is grim, with no sign that Palestinian violence will abate. Public statements by some Palestinian youths suggest they hope to wear Israel down, forcing Israel out of the territories much as Shia resistance in southern Lebanon in the early 1980s led to an Israeli "retreat."

In our judgment, the Israeli military is unlikely to back away from its tough approach and is preparing for an extended stay in the occupied territories. Most Israelis believe that the rioting will not soon abate and that the situation will get worse before it gets better. Any escalation in the violence inevitably will elicit a harsher military response.

We believe that a protracted engagement of a large Israeli force in the occupied territories would severely strain the limited manpower available both to contain the unrest and to defend Israel's borders. Such a long-term commitment also would force additional activations of reservists, cause further disruptions in regular training, and undermine troop morale.

Although Palestinians within the territories have not yet resorted to using firearms in the territories--largely for fear of forfeiting favorable international media coverage--some extremists are likely to do so eventually. Such a change of tactics--making Israeli deaths nearly inevitable--would mark an ominous turn toward an increasingly lethal, armed civilian rebellion and an even more forceful Israeli military crack-down.

Islamic Fundamentalist Groups

Muslim fundamentalists have been among the leaders of the protests, especially in Gaza,

The two most active fundamentalist groups in Gaza are the Mujama' and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

The Mujama' is led by Shaykh Ahmad Yasin. It has ties to the Muslim Brotherhood and is popular with university students; it won about 80 percent of the vote in the student union election in December at the Islamic University of Gaza. The Mujama' emphasizes that the public must be prepared spiritually to live by Islamic law as a first step to removing the Israeli occupation and imposing Islamic rule.

The more radical Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which is not related to a similarly-named Shia extremist group in Lebanon, appears to be a loose coalition of cells sharing a common belief in revolution against Israeli authority.

It has organized demonstrations and apparently tried to kill Israeli soldiers and civilians in Gaza.

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Sharon in Gaza: A Hardliner's Model for Quashing Unrest

In recent weeks, some Israeli hawks have called for the kind of severe measures used by Ariel Sharon in 1971 following a prolonged period of Palestinian violence in the Gaza Strip. General Sharon--then in charge of the Southern Command, including Gaza--instituted a "pacification" plan to quell Palestinian opposition to Israeli occupation.

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After the Gaza Strip fell under Israeli control in 1967, Palestinian guerrillas attacked Israeli army and government targets--effectively controlling the Gaza Strip by night and hiding in refugee camps and orange groves by day. Refugee camp residents supplied the guerrillas with food and clothing, and arms reached them from the Sinai and Lebanon.

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Within a year of implementing his draconian suppression plan, Sharon had gained total military control over the Gaza Strip--but at an immense cost to the Palestinian population. The Israeli army routinely fired into crowds of demonstrators and arrested or deported thousands of civilians. Hundreds of Palestinian guerrillas were captured or killed. Collective punishment became the norm as the army imposed extended curfews on the camps and deported whole families of suspected Palestinian guerrillas to the Sinai. Bulldozers destroyed wells and rows of refugee camp housing--leaving thousands homeless--to "thin out" congested residential areas and to make room for military patrols.

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Recently, according to Israeli press reports, Israeli security forces on the West Bank have begun nighttime raids into Arab villages to apprehend suspected rioters. This tactic is similar to Sharon's plan, albeit on a much smaller scale. Just as Sharon intended in 1971, the midnight raids are probably intended both to discourage residents from disrupting traffic and attacking Israeli vehicles with stones and to intimidate more radical and committed Palestinian young people into submission.

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