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Approved For Release 1999/08/24 : CIA-RDP78-03061A000400020019-7

TIME
13 December 1968

THE GUERRILLA THREAT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The revolution of Fatah exists!
It exists here, there and everywhere.
It is a storm, a storm in every
house and village.

FAITHFUL and unfailing as the muezzin's call from the minaret, that heady cry goes out nightly from a radio station in Cairo to the Arab lands. It is the "Voice of El Fatah," speaking for the Arab commando organization whose bands of raiders cross each night into hated Israel, bent on bringing death, destruction and terror. To Arabs huddled in wind-chilling refugee tents outside


TERENCE SPENCER

ARAFAT IN JORDAN

Amman, sipping thick coffee in the drawing rooms of Damascus, or lounging in the common rooms of the American University of Beirut, the Voice brings welcome—if often inaccurate—news. The fight against Israel continues, it asserts, despite the Arabs' humiliating defeat in last year's war. Each night new Arab heroes are born, fresh revenge is meted out to Israel, a portion of Arab pride is restored. Amid the breathless bulletins and the florid rhetoric of propaganda, there are the underground's customary coded messages: "M.H.: the bird is back in the cage"; "Attention Green Lion: the gift has been received."

On Fatah's signal, a band of Arabs sets out across the Jordan River on rafts made from tractor tires, carrying their Russian-made Kalashnikov assault rifles in waterproof inner tubes. In the darkness they land, make their way inland, plant a mine, ambush an Israeli patrol or throw a grenade, then scramble as best they can for home. The odds are heavily against their making it back, for many are caught or killed by efficient Israeli security forces. But the rewards are high, as posthumous compensations go. They are martyrs to all Arabs, their photographs and tales of their exploits are displayed in Cairo and Amman. Under the rules of jihad, or holy war, proclaimed against Israel by Moslem leaders from 34 countries last October, those Arabs who fall in battle are accorded the reverence of prophets and go straight to paradise.

The Elements of Instability

The Fatah is one of several similar clandestine organizations. While no one can be sure of the exact numbers involved, Fatah is the most prominent and the largest of them. To the Israelis, the raiders are terrorists and thugs, inept and indiscriminate in their missions. To the Arabs, they are freedom fighters in the best guerrilla tradition, skilled in the arts of the commando and the saboteur. The world knows them best as the fedayeen, meaning "men of sacrifice," a disparate group of clandestine plotters often at odds with one another, who play a large part in keeping the Middle East on the edge of war.

There is no more perilously unstable area in the world. Israel, despite its overwhelming victory in last year's war, grows increasingly frustrated as it finds peace with its encircling Arab neighbors still beyond reach. The Arab countries, their armies and air forces rebuilding with major Soviet aid and advice, refuse to accept fully their defeat or abandon completely their long-range goal of eliminating Israel. The more responsible Arab leaders, including Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser and Jordan's King Hussein, know that any early attack on Israel would only result in another resounding defeat. But in a measure they are prisoners of their Arab masses, long fed on the oratory of hate and revenge and embittered by the 26,000 sq. mi. of Arab territory—taken from Jordan, Syria and Egypt—now occupied by the Israelis.

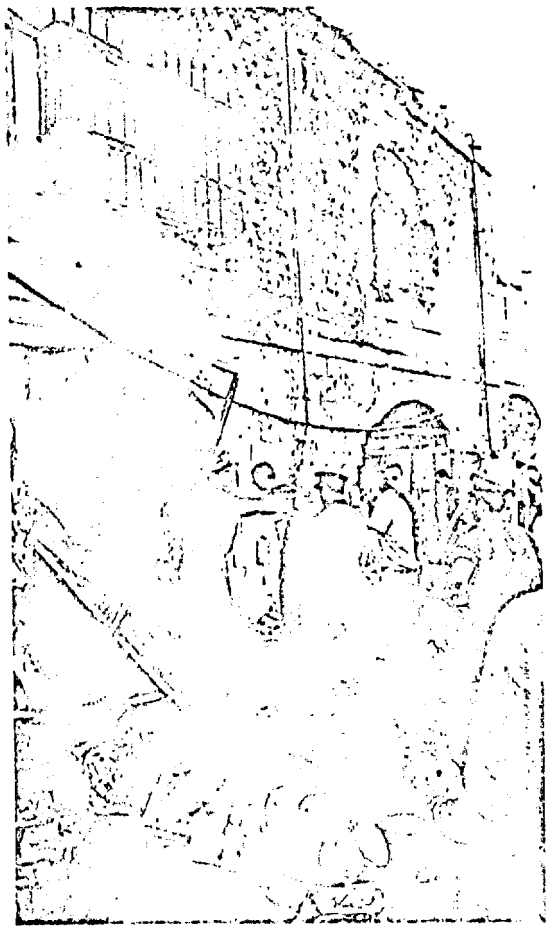
Despite their common adversity, the Arabs are as quarrelsome and mistrustful of one another as ever. Iraq, for example, has sent troops to bolster shattered Jordan's defenses against Israel, and King Hussein worries about the Iraqis in his midst almost as much as he does about Israel. The U.S. is committed to peace in the area and to Israel's right to exist; but also vitally needs to establish better relations with the Arabs, most of whom regard America as simply the backer and ally of Israel. In this situation, Washington can do little beyond attempting to keep a reasonable balance of arms among the antagonists. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union, more influential in the Arab world than ever because of its arms shipments, has staked its own claim to the use of the Mediterranean for its expanding navy, sharply increasing the danger of a direct U.S.-Russian confrontation on the high seas should a new Middle East war break out.

For more than twelve months, United Nations Special Representative Gunnar Jarring has patiently sought grounds

EL FATAH POSTER PROCLAIMS: "THIS IS THE WAY TO LIBERATION OF MY HOMELAND. AND SO, MY BROTHERS, I'LL FIGHT ON."

for agreement, and at least succeeded in becoming an intermediary whom both sides trust and through whom they have begun, in a fashion, to talk to each other. In the bitter history of Arab-Israeli relations, that is no mean accomplishment. Though his mandate was due to expire this month, both sides want him to stay on the job. One of the reasons is that Israel's stunning victory in the Six-Day War introduced at least a

small element of reality into the Middle East impasse. Before the 1967 war, the only issue was Israeli expansion—a matter clearly not negotiable at a conference table between the Israelis and the Arabs. But the matter of recovering the occupied territories is negotiable—theoretically. In the discussions with Jarring, the Israelis so far refuse to give up any of the occupied territories without guarantees of progress toward a full Middle East settlement. The Arabs in turn so far refuse to talk about a settlement until the Israelis return the Arab lands.



JERUSALEM MARKETPLACE BOMBED BY EL FATAH
Outlet for defeat and disillusionment.

At times last week it seemed that the area's fourth war in two decades was already in progress. Israeli and Jordanian artillery opened up on two successive days. For the first time, Israelis also hit at the 15,000 Iraqi troops stationed in Jordan, who recently started firing their long-range, 122-mm. Russian heavy guns into Israel. Israeli jets flashed across the cease-fire lines three times to bomb the area around the Jordanian town of Irbid and hammer at the artillery positions of the 421st Iraqi battalion. Deep inside Jordan, Israeli commandos blew up two vital bridges connecting Amman and the port of Aqaba (*see map*).

In the past, the United Nations has merely deplored violations of the truce and urged all parties to get on with negotiations. Last week the great powers gave fresh evidence of their heightened concern that the fighting might get out of hand. Russia publicly urged a political settlement, declaring for the first time that it would not "permit" a resumption of war—whatever that meant. Washington registered its anxiety by calling in the Israeli and Jordanian ambassadors. They were warned against the dangers of continuing to violate the tattered cease-fire agreement that ended the Six-Day War.

It is in this tense milieu that the Arabs' "men of sacrifice" operate, in a defiant effort to exploit its instabilities to their own ends. The fedayeen, who owe no fealty to any government, are responsible only to themselves, and view any settlement as a betrayal and a disaster. They possess the power to sting Israel into repeated reprisals, and perhaps to whip Arab popular opinion to such a pitch that not even Nasser with all his prestige might dare a settlement with Israel. In Jordan, their primary staging area, they constitute virtually a state-within-a-state and could probably topple King Hussein and take over his splintered kingdom if they chose. And their power and influence are increasing all the time.

The Palestinian Diaspora

The primary sources of fedayeen strength are the Palestinian refugees, now 1,500,000 strong, who for 20 years have been a scattered and forlorn people, possessing neither a country nor any say in the harsh events profoundly affecting them. Dispossessed of their homes, lands and sense of nationhood when Israel was founded in 1948, they dispersed throughout the Middle East. They endured the scorn of their host populations toward outsiders, although the most skilled and educated came to dominate many areas of Arab intellectual and commercial life. Those that did not assimilate settled in crowded camps, mostly in Jordan and the Gaza Strip, where they lived a miserable, subsistence life, fed by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

For 20 years they have been pawns in Arab politics, nourished on promises of a return to Palestine and a passionate hatred of Israel. Today the camps house 540,000, including 350,000 new refugees who fled the occupied territories after the June War. The camps seethe with frustration and anger, and provide a rich source of recruits for fedayeen. Says the mother of one dead commando: "I am proud that he did not die in this camp. The foreign press comes here and takes our pictures standing in food queues, and they publish them and say 'Look at this nation of beggars.' This is no life. I am proud to

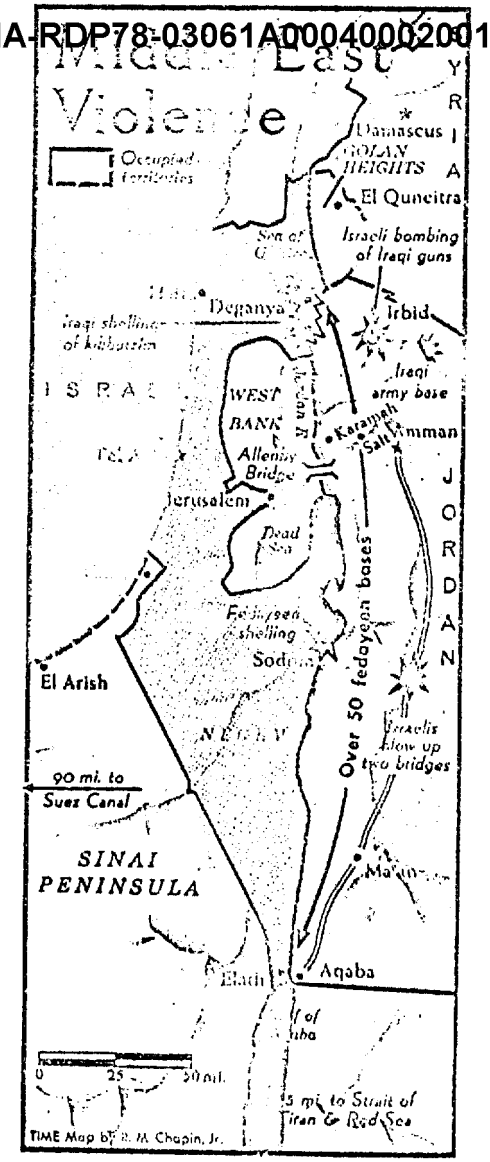
send my second son to replace the first, [illegible] year-old boy for the day when he can fight too."

With the fanaticism and desperation of men who have nothing to lose, the fedayeen have taken the destiny of the Palestinians into their own hands. Peace in the area would hurt their cause by removing the support of other Arabs. They have no brotherly concern for the ambitions of Nasser—and certainly not for, as one fedayeen communiqué puts it, the "slave traffickers in the U.N. lobbies" and their efforts to act as mediators in the Middle East.

In the aftermath of the Arab defeat, the fedayeen are today the only ones carrying the fight to Israel. The guerrillas provide an outlet for the fierce Arab resentment of Israel and give an awakened sense of pride to a people accustomed to decades of defeat, disillusionment and humiliation. In the process, the Arabs have come to idolize Mohammed ("Yasser") Arafat, a leader of El Fatah fedayeen who has emerged as the most visible spokesman for the commandos. An intense, secretive and determined Palestinian, he is enthusiastically portrayed by the admiring Arab press as a latter-day Saladin, with the Israelis supplanting the Crusaders as the hated-and feared-foe.

It was the Israeli victory last year that, as one fedayeen commander puts it, "handed us the Arab people on a golden platter." Students quit their classes to sign up as terrorists. Doctors abandoned their practices in Beirut and Cairo to come to Jordan to attend wounded fedayeen. Arab businessmen offered supplies and purchased weapons, and the Saudi and Kuwait governments began diverting to fedayeen coffers funds usually contributed to Jordan's budget. Individual contributions by the thousands poured in from Arabs throughout the Middle East and those abroad; the wife of Saudi Arabia's King Feisal sent $4,500. In the coffee bars of Beirut, young Arabs peddle El Fatah stamps, to be used like Christmas seals, bearing a picture of a burned child and the words "Shalom and Napalm"—a reference to the use of napalm by Israelis in last August's reprisal raid on the Jordanian town of Salt. Other stamps show a guerrilla fighter, a monument to martyrs or Jerusalem, with the slogan: "Palestinian Resistance." The money raised, of course, goes to buy bullets.

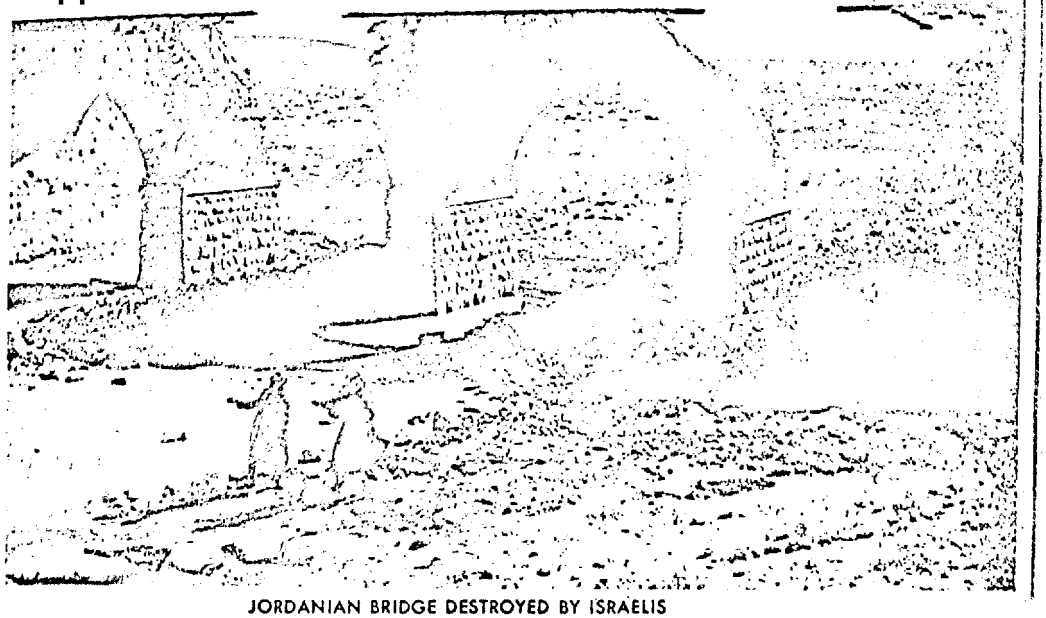
Contributing to the fedayeen mystique is their shadowy organization, which somehow manages to appear to be everywhere in the Arab countries. At the airport of Amman, dark-suited youths sidle up to customs officers as crates marked "Palestine Nation, Amman" or "Freedom Fighters against Israel, Amman" are unloaded, and whisper, "For the fedayeen." Customs formalities are cut short, and the supplies are whisked away. The goods may be headed for any one of more than 50 bases maintained by the fedayeen in the Jordanian mountains east of Wadi Araba, the desert valley that stretches from the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba.



No one knows how many Arab commandos roam about in that desolate stretch, from which raiders set out nightly, but estimates range upward from 10,000. Besides their base camps, there are other installations as well. The fedayeen maintain at least a dozen underground field hospitals and supply depots, as well as training camps for *ashbals*, or tiger cubs—refugee children who are taught the art of guerrilla war beginning at age eight.

Ambassador Extraordinary

The fedayeen are most secretive of all about their high command, though the largest organization, Arafat's El Fatah, is said to be ruled by a committee



JORDANIAN BRIDGE DESTROYED BY ISRAELIS
Response in traditional fashion.

of wealthy civilians in Damascus. Nor does anyone really know very much about Yasser Arafat, though everyone in the Arab world knows who he is. As El Fatah grew and felt the need for a visible spokesman, he became its ambassador extraordinary to the Arab world, its chief fund raiser and its field commander in Jordan. Arafat (his code name is Abu Ammar) sits at a wooden desk in his headquarters in Amman, dealing with a procession of couriers like a general on a field of battle, which in a sense he is. When a guerrilla comes in to report a successful raid, Arafat's eyes, bulging almost to the panes of the dark glasses he wears day and night, dance with delight. He speaks softly and turns aside all questions about himself: "Please, no personality cult. I am only a soldier. Our leader is Palestine. Our road is the road of death and sacrifice to win back our homeland. If we cannot do it, our children will, and if they cannot do it, their children will."

Arafat's career in a way mirrors the history and thrust of the fedayeen. Born in Jerusalem, he spent his early childhood in a house within a stone's throw of the Wailing Wall. The area today is marked by the Israelis for bulldozing. Of that prospect, Arafat says bitterly: "We will see that our homes are rebuilt." Descended from Palestinian nobility, Arafat learned early what dispossession meant. According to one story widely told in the Middle East, his family has been disinherited of enormous wealth for 150 years through a legal tangle that deprived it of land once owned in downtown Cairo. Arafat's father spent a lifetime trying to reclaim the land in the Egyptian courts but was overruled first by King Farouk and then Nasser. There are those who suspect that that may be one factor in Arafat's occasional lack of enthusiasm for Egypt's ruler.

A teen-age gunrunner in the 1948 war with Israel, Arafat afterward enrolled at Fuad I (now Cairo) University, where he majored in civil engineering—and in Palestinian nationalism as president of the Palestine Student Federation. After graduating, he worked in Kuwait, editing an ultranationalist magazine on the side. In 1955, he appeared in Cairo attending officers' school, where he specialized in explosives. He graduated as a lieutenant just in time to share in another Arab defeat, at Suez a year later.

That debacle only confirmed Arafat's conviction that the Arabs could never defeat the Israelis with conventional armies. Throughout the 1950s, he had organized "cells" among Palestinian students abroad and studied the techniques of Algerian guerrillas. At that time, Nasser had organized forerunners of today's fedayeen among Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, and used them to stir up the border, a role they took on with sufficient enthusiasm to help bring about Israel's decision to launch the 1956 war. After Suez, El Fatah* was founded as a strictly Palestinian force outside Nasser's reach.

* The name is an acronym derived from the Arabic words *Harakat al Tahrir al-Falastin*, or Movement for the Liberation of Palestine. Its initials, *H.T.F.*, form the Arabic word for death. They are ingeniously reversible to *F.T.H.*, pronounced "faht," meaning conquest —hence El Fatah or, as it is less commonly spelled, El Fateh.

Not until 1964 was El Fatah ready [illegible] water-pumping station. It was an "experimental era," recalls Arafat, when El Fatah staged only one raid a week, testing out attack techniques, taking notes on Israeli defenses and reaction times, and filing away the information to be used in future battle plans. "We were also experimenting with public opinion all through this period," Arafat's top aide told TIME Correspondent Edward Hughes last week. According to the dictum of Mao Tse-tung, guerrilla fighters must be able to live among a friendly population like fish in water. But El Fatah at that time "had no audience. Without the people to listen to us, we had no sea to swim in—the fish had no oxygen."

The Expansion of the War

After last year's war, El Fatah found itself not only swimming in popular support but also possessed of a sudden bequest of weapons left by the retreating Arab armies. The battlefields were littered with arms, and for two weeks, El Fatah teams took camels into the Sinai desert to collect machine guns, rifles, grenades and bazookas before the Israeli salvage squads. Four heavy trucks were found in Golan, along with two tons of ammunition and weapons. A Bedouin offered to sell 150 Kalashnikov rifles for $140. El Fatah gave him twice as much. Another Bedouin found a Syrian helicopter and built a tent to hide it for the El Fatah men. But when they arrived, they had no helicopter pilot along, so the craft was destroyed. A cache of eight tons of TNT, too heavy to carry away, was buried in the Sinai: "We don't have to carry explosives into that area. It's there waiting for us," Arafat says.

By August 1967, El Fatah was ready to try to launch an underground revolt among the Arabs on the now occupied West Bank. Hundreds of guerrillas trekked across the Jordan River, only to be rounded up by Israeli forces. To head off any future attempts, the Israelis blew up the homes of any Palestinians who cooperated with Arafat's men. El Fatah's next phase was a campaign that sent smaller groups to hide in caves or live with sympathetic Arabs, and venture out at night to set mines or time bombs. Israel hit back at their riverside guerrilla camps, forcing El Fatah to move its bases farther inland. Despite these setbacks, the fedayeen have been able to step up their operations to as many as two dozen a day. Though El Fatah hotly rejects being called terroristic, it has also turned increasingly to attacking Israel's civilian population. The methods are brutal and indiscriminate, random terrorism for terrorism's sake without any military value

FEDAYEEN GIRL PRACTICES RIFLERY
Breaking the chains.

—a bomb in a crowded cinema, a grenade thrown in a schoolyard, a mine planted for anyone who comes along. Last week a 17-year-old Los Angeles girl, Sari Roberta, who had gone to Israel to serve as a volunteer worker, lost her right leg when she stepped on a mine.

By laying down a strict policy of staying out of Arab politics on the ground that, as Arafat says, "one enemy at a time is enough," El Fatah has so far been able to operate independently in the host Arab countries—chiefly Jordan. Disputes with rival fedayeen organizations are another matter, and on one occasion two groups of raiders almost shot it out, each thinking the other was Israeli. Last month, the fedayeen set up a council to coordinate raids between El Fatah and its two chief rivals, the Palestine Liberation Force and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, or P.F.L.P. (inevitably pronounced "flop" by Westerners on the scene), a militantly leftist merger of several splinter organizations on the scene.

Training for Terror

From the refugee camps, and from universities that are often staffed with zealous Palestinian professors, come a steady stream of several hundred recruits a month—more, in fact, than El Fatah can handle. It accepts Palestinians for the most part, and only those who pass rigorous medical tests and an examination by a team of psychiatrists. A recruit must also pass a final, brutal test of fortitude. He is handed a large

box containing the body of a newly [illegible] the blood seeps out, he is told, "Inside this box is a wounded comrade. Take it and carry it around the block and bring it back here." The recruit is not inclined to ask questions. If he vomits or faints on the spot, he is gently steered to an easier job as a courier, or told to go home and simply spy on his neighbors. If he passes, he is sent to one of dozens of different training camps in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq.

Outside Amman, children, aged eight to twelve, from the *Baq'aa* refugee camp, are trained in commando techniques. They are given rigorous calisthenics and obstacle-course training, taught to handle rifles and machine guns, and instructed where the larynx, heart, liver and intestines are located, the better to thrust a dagger in the right place. Daughters of dead fedayeen are sent to schools run by the "Martyr Family Welfare Service," where they are taught to chant: "I have broken my chains. I am the daughter of Fatah! We are all commandos." Refugee women are trained in first aid and in handling weapons.

In El Fatah's headquarters buildings in Amman, a hectic bustle reflects the growth of the movement. Switchboard operators bellow into makeshift World War II British field telephones, trying to make contact with branch offices in Salt or Irbid. Most communication is still by handwritten letter, carried by couriers on bicycles, in Jeeps or on foot. When a dusty Arab arrives with a tightly wadded piece of paper, Arafat scribbles an answer in the margin, then sends the courier off again. Agents arriving in little black Volkswagens dash up for conferences. A white ambulance pulls up bearing the insignia of the Red Crescent, the Moslem equivalent of the Red Cross. When a cargo of green filing cabinets was unloaded last week, a guerrilla with a .45 stuck in his belt smiled: "Our accounting department has arrived."

These days El Fatah hardly has time to fight as it copes with the avalanche of aid. Stacks of bandages, food and ammunition are piled everywhere. Sometimes the arriving shipments include beer. It is not drunk; the fedayeen sell it and use the money to purchase arms. Some of the fedayeen weapons are purchased directly, but some are contributed by Arab governments, particularly Egypt, Iraq and Syria, which help out in other ways as well. A Syrian raider captured by the Israelis revealed that he had been trained by Egyptian army officers.

There is no evidence of direct Russian aid to the fedayeen. Any aid they might want to offer can be funneled through the Arab governments. Direct

ASHBAL (TIGER CUB) AT ATTENTION
Learning the art at eight.

Soviet aid might endanger the Kremlin's ties with those governments. Also, Moscow may well view the fedayeen as a dangerous and uncontrollable factor in the Middle East equation. While the Soviets may or may not want a genuine peace in the area, they clearly do not want a new war now—and another likely humiliating Arab defeat that could destroy their influence in the region.

Nor are the fedayeen getting aid or inspiration from the world's other main revolutionary fount, Peking. "We read Mao, but he isn't really relevant," says a young raider. To the fedayeen, the model and example is the Algerian revolution. For ideology, they look to its apostle, Frantz Fanon, the late Martinique-born Negro psychiatrist, who preached in *The Wretched of the Earth* that for oppressed and colonized people of the world "violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect."

In the view of the Palestinians, Israel is an imperialist colonial power occupying their land. With no hope of driving the Israelis out themselves, the Palestinians aim to provoke Israel into taking over so much territory that it finally chokes on a glut of Arabs within its borders. Moreover, says Arafat, "the very process of Israeli expansion will extend the war of liberation into all the countries bordering on the occupied territories, and they will take up the struggle in defense of their own ex-

istence," pushed Yahya Hammuda into the PLO's executive committee and drawn in on the Arabs' side.

The Catalogue of Violence

To that fantastic end, the fedayeen have staged some 1,000 incidents over the last year, and killed or wounded over 900 Israelis. When a school bus struck one of their mines last March, 28 children were wounded and two adults killed. In August, the guerrillas managed to terrorize the population of Jerusalem and in the bargain set off an anti-Arab riot by a series of grenade attacks. In September, they struck for the first time at Tel Aviv, where a commando bomb in a wastebasket outside the bus station killed one Israeli and wounded another ten.

To date, the fedayeen's most damaging operation was a bomb in Jerusalem's Mahaneh Yehuda marketplace last month. It killed twelve civilians and wounded 53. Embarrassingly for the guerrillas, two rival groups claimed credit, but the Fatah man, a burly, mustachioed Arab dressed in dungarees and a dirty white sweater, told the more convincing story, and the fedayeen council granted the glory to El Fatah. Arriving back at Arafat's headquarters in suburban Amman, he related that he wore a stolen Israeli policeman's uniform, drove a small, British-built delivery van to the market, and parked it while armed terrorists covered him from nearby hiding spots. The van was loaded with 300 lbs. of TNT, 30 lbs. of gelignite and several cases of scrap metal to serve as shrapnel, all topped by beer bottles filled with a mixture of oil and gasoline. He set a small, pencil-shaped fuse timed to explode an hour later, and was three-quarters of a mile away when he heard the blast. He escaped by hiking the 22 miles from Jerusalem to the Jordan River.

In the complex world of the Middle East, no one can ever be sure whose set of claims is true. El Fatah has publicly taken credit for blasting the garage of former Israeli Chief of Staff Itzhak Rabin, even though he has no garage, and for wounding Defense Minister Moshe Dayan last March, who was actually hurt in an archeological cave-in. After Israel's independence day parade last May, El Fatah crowed that "a suicide force managed to reach the rear of the parade and shell it with rockets and mortars. Our forces destroyed a number of tanks that were seen to go up in flames." This remarkable event was entirely invisible to Israelis and foreign dignitaries watching the parade. When a $1,000,000 fire damaged Tel Aviv's Lydda Airport in October, El Fatah promptly took credit for setting it. The Israelis insist that the blaze was started accidentally by a welder's torch.

To the guerrillas' disadvantage, the bleak, rocky West Bank, where they target most of their operations, does not provide good cover, and the Israelis are a formidably efficient enemy. They claim to have killed or captured 2,650 fedayeen and tend to dismiss them as amateurs. "We cannot dignify them with the name guerrilla or commando," says an Israeli officer. "The Arabs who cross over show no daring. In that respect, they are nowhere near Viet Cong standards." The Israelis do respect Arafat, however. Their intelligence network has twice reported him on Israeli soil, and twice he escaped a dragnet. "Anyone who can do that has to be pretty shrewd," admits an Israeli intelligence officer grudgingly.

The newest Israeli countermeasure is an electronic barrier that stretches about 40 miles along the Jordan River Valley. The fence is a smaller version of the one that former Defense Secretary Robert McNamara once envisioned putting up in Viet Nam below the DMZ to prevent North Vietnamese infiltration. It consists of an outer line of 8-ft.-high barbed wire and an inner, 5-ft.-high line 10 yds. away. The space between is laced with mines. At irregular intervals along the fence are strung electronic sensing devices, which raise an alarm in adjacent guard posts when an infiltrator tries to cross. The guards in turn alert nearby army units, equipped to react quickly with helicopters and powerful searchlights.

There are signs that Israel's traditional response to commando activity, a retaliation raid in massive force, only serves to steel the will of the fedayeen and win them new allies among the Jordanian people. Last March, an armored column of more than 1,000 Israeli men punched across the Jordan River to destroy a guerrilla base at Karamah. They succeeded, but Karamah became the fedayeen Alamo. In the furious battle, as El Fatah recounts it, one youth strapped a bundle of TNT around his waist and jumped on an Israeli tank, blowing himself up with it. From the surrounding hills, the regular Jordanian army poured a withering fire on Israeli troops, who had to fight their way home, taking high casualties. Jordan's King Hussein went on television after the battle ended and declared, in words that have since been taken up as a rousing slogan throughout the Arab countries, "I think we may reach a position where we are all fedayeen."

Thus for all the Israelis' contempt for the raiders, there is evidence that they are worried. Recently, Israel closed the Allenby Bridge over the Jordan River to truck traffic, reversing its own policy of keeping connections between Jordan and the West Bank open. Now trucks coming from Jordan must unload on one side, and the goods are reloaded into Israeli vehicles on the other side, all under the watchful eyes of police. Police barricades have been set up outside Jerusalem and more green-bereted civil guards called up to reserve duty. At Israeli schools, teachers are now being lectured on anti-terrorist tactics and given courses in first aid, and schoolchildren are instructed in how to identify mines. Cinema ushers and janitors are undergoing training to learn how to take precautions against bombs. In a treatise on El Fatah to be published next month by London's Institute for Strategic Studies, Yehoshafat Harkabi, a former chief of Israeli intelligence, warns that "subversion may become a feature of our lives for a length of time that no one can foresee. It might become like the toll of traffic accidents modern societies have to pay." Over the long run, there is perhaps a danger that the fedayeen campaign may strike severe blows at Israeli democracy, as ever more repressive measures are required to hold down terrorism.

The Dilemma for the U.S.

Yet there are many in the Middle East who believe that the fedayeen pose the greatest long-run threat not to Israel but rather to Hussein and Nasser. In Jordan, the fedayeen in a recent showdown with the King won the right to run their own military show without interference from the Jordanian army (TIME, Nov. 22). So great is the popular groundswell for the movement that no Arab leader dares condemn it or openly talk peace on any terms that Israel might be likely to accept. Israel has not helped by its policy of holding each Arab government responsible for the acts of the fedayeen launched from its territory—though it is hard to see what else Israel could do. Caught between the Israelis and their own militant populations, Arab leaders could be pushed to extremes to which they do not want to go. Lest he appear less militant than the guerrillas, Nasser has sent half of Egypt's 141st battalion to southern Jordan and last October Egyptian forces launched an artillery attack on Israel for no other apparent purpose than to silence sniping at home about his comparative lack of zeal against Israel.

The Risks of Now Policies

If the fedayeen continue to grow, they could so embitter an already desperate situation that a peace settlement might become impossible and a new war likely. To avoid such a showdown, Washington may be forced to reconsider its official policy of leaving the Israelis and Arabs to settle their own affairs and join with the Russians in an attempt to impose a peace settlement.

The Administration already feels that Israel's discussions of various plans for setting occupied territories [illegible] blunder, reinforcing Arab claims that Israel is bent on expansion and likely to bring on irresistible popular demands for war. Israel has reacted angrily to U.S. pressures to return most of the occupied territories. Any additional attempt to impose a settlement would pose several risks for President-elect Nixon—who last week sent former Pennsylvania Governor William Scranton on a tour of the Middle East to sound positions on both sides. Among [illegible] ish community and other pro-Israeli sympathizers. Yet, asks Washington, what is the alternative to taking a strong diplomatic hand? It could be for the United States to find itself trapped in the ring with the equally reluctant Russians, should the Arabs and Israelis square off for another round of full-scale war.

NEWSWEEK
13 January 1969

Middle East: That Is the War That Is

In embassies and foreign ministries around the world last week, diplomats spoke soberly of the danger of war in the Middle East. In so doing, they were closing their eyes to an overriding fact: there already *is* a war in the Middle East. And it is a war in which, for the first time in their twenty-year struggle with Israel, the Arabs are scoring some notable successes.

At the moment, of course, the violence in the Middle East is small beer compared with that raging in Vietnam and Nigeria. But it is serious enough. Last week alone, six Israelis were killed by Arab rockets, shells and mines (map, page 39)—and just how many Arabs died at Israeli hands may never be known. From Israeli helicopters hovering near the Jordanian city of Aqaba, from Arab bazookas zeroed in on King Solomon's Mines, from artillery dug in on both sides of the Jordan River, and from Russian rocket launchers high up in the craggy Lebanese mountains, death and destruction poured forth. "We stay home at night more than we used to," one nervous Jerusalem housewife admitted. "We listen to the radio every hour to find out where they have struck this time—and where we have hit back at them."

Israel's most dramatic riposte against the Arabs, of course, occurred two weeks ago at Beirut International Airport. That raid, one of the most daring and precise in the history of an army that specializes in daring and precision, came off militarily like an exceptionally clean piece of surgery. Shortly after 9 p.m., four helicopters with the Star of David on their sides knifed in from the Mediterranean and touched down at Beirut airport. Within minutes, Israeli commandos armed with Uzi submachine guns and satchels of dynamite were masters of the field. By the time the Israelis headed for home 45 minutes later, half of Lebanon's commercial air fleet lay in ruins—yet not a single Arab or Israeli had lost his life.

The Beirut strike, as the Israelis endlessly emphasized, was in retaliation for the machine-gunning of an El Al jetliner at Athens airport by Arab terrorists—an attack in which one Israeli civilian was killed and another injured. The decision to launch the retaliatory attack was made at a night session of the Israeli Cabinet. There was some opposition to the idea from a few ministers, including, according to most accounts, Foreign Minister Abba Eban, the perennial dove in the Israeli political aviary. In the end, however, a majority of the Cabinet approved the raid—with the stipulations that only Lebanese aircraft were to be attacked and that every effort be made to avoid casualties on both sides. The Cabinet reportedly did not specify the number of planes the raiders were to destroy and, in point of fact, the commandos apparently had no idea how many aircraft they would find when they arrived at Beirut.

As things turned out, they found and destroyed thirteen—which was roughly a dozen more than world opinion, conditioned to the Biblical principle of an eye for an eye, could accept. "Scandalous international banditry," trumpeted Moscow. "An exaggerated act of violence," intoned French President Charles de Gaulle. From Rome, Pope Paul VI sent a message to Lebanese President Charles Helou deploring the attack. And in Washington, Presidential aide Walt Rostow expressed the dismay of the U.S. "We think it is a grave matter," he said, "for regular forces of the government of Israel to attack a civil international airport in a country which has been striving toward moderation in the Middle East."

Condemn: Most damaging of all to Israel's international position was the response in the United Nations. With the strongly worded approval of U.S. delegate J. Russell Wiggins, the U.N. Security Council unanimously condemned the raid on Beirut airport, said that it was up to Israel to compensate Lebanon for its financial losses (which amounted to more than $40 million) and warned that the Council might consider imposing sanctions against Jerusalem if the Israelis struck again.

Predictably, the Israelis were furious at the world reaction. Religious Affairs Minister Zerah Warhaftig, speaking at a memorial service for victims of Nazism, lashed out angrily at the Pope for failing to balance his criticism of Israel with criticism of Arab terrorism. "The Pope's voice," said Warhaftig, "was silent when Jews were attacked—just as his predecessor [Pope Pius XII] was silent . . . when millions of Jews were being murdered." As for the Security Council resolution, it merely added to the contempt with which most Israelis now regard the U.N. (box). Even Israelis who were privately willing to concede that the Beirut raid might have been a case of "overkill" thought that the world was operating on a double standard. "No one else is denied the right of self-defense," said one Israeli official, "so why are we supposed to turn the other cheek?" Then he added bitterly: "We ran out of extra cheeks a long time ago."

Most Israelis also rejected the argument that Lebanon, a democratic state by Arab standards and one whose borders with Israel have hitherto been the quietest in the Middle East, was an inappropriate target. Both attacks so far made on El Al airliners, the Israelis pointed out, were the work of a guerrilla group based in Lebanon. More serious

yet, in Israeli eyes, the Lebanese Government is guilty of harboring terrorist groups and permits them to recruit members in the teeming Palestinian refugee camps near the Lebanese capital.

Stake: To many Israelis the choice of targets was a peripheral matter. What really was at stake in the dispute over the Beirut strike was the Israeli policy of holding Arab governments responsible for terrorists who operate within their borders. "The only ones who can stop the terrorists, aside from the Israeli Army," one official in Jerusalem asserted, "are the Arab governments themselves. With the help of our army, we're trying to convince those governments to do so."

This, of course, is an Israeli strategy of long standing. And there was a time when it had a certain logic. Before the 1967 war in the Middle East, some Arab governments, aware that they would be held accountable by the Israelis for terrorist actions, did, in fact, try to restrain the guerrilla movements. Ironically, however, the foundations of this strategy were destroyed by Israel's stunning military triumph in June 1967. Almost without exception, the Arab governments emerged from the war politically weakened. At the same time, the Middle East's 1.5 million Palestinian refugees were abruptly stripped of their twenty-year-old illusion that they could sit in the camps and wait until their fellow Arabs crushed Israel. With this mental crutch gone, the Palestinians fell back on their own resources and set out to do the job themselves. Their chosen tool—the only one available to them—was the commandos, whose proliferation has been the most striking development in the Middle East in the last nineteen months.

Today in Jordan, the guerrillas, in effect, constitute a state within a state. If King Hussein were to try to suppress them, he would almost surely lose his throne. And, in greater or lesser degree, the leaders of all the other Arab states are also politically compelled to endorse the terrorists. "The policy of instant reprisal has backfired in Israel's face," says one British expert on Middle Eastern affairs. "It has built up the terrorists as a moral force among ordinary Arabs and weakened the ability of Arab governments to control the guerrillas or engage in peace negotiations."

Sense: Beyond that, there is the military fact that destroying Lebanese aircraft or Egyptian oil refineries hurts the terrorists not at all. "If the Israelis think they are punishing us by wrecking a Lebanese airline largely owned by French and U.S. interests and insured by British Jewish underwriters," said one guerrilla leader, "they are losing their sense of judgment."

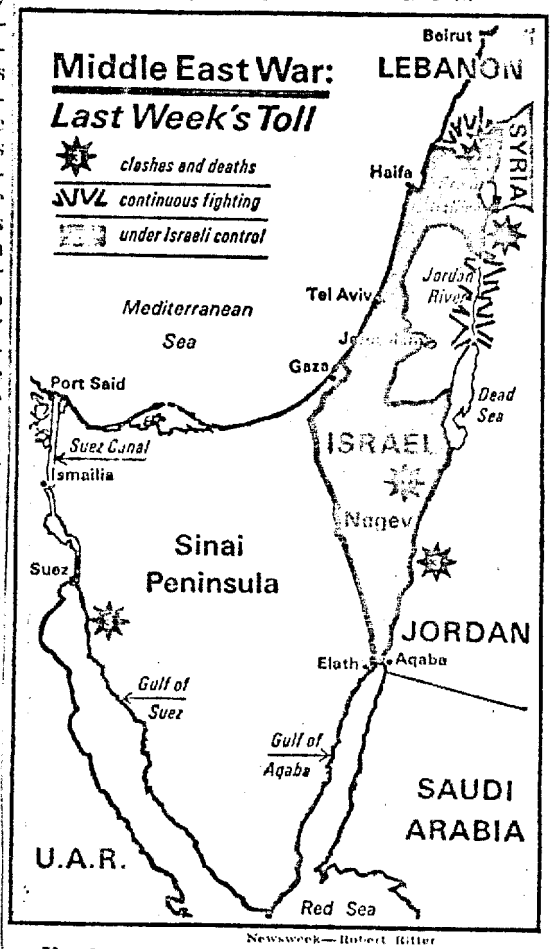
Why, then, have the Israelis continued to flail out with their reprisal raids? In part, the answer is that it would be politically dangerous for any Israeli leader to appear soft on terrorism. Against the constant guerrilla threat and the loss of civilian lives, much of the Israeli public is in no mood to listen to appeals to reason. But perhaps more important, all of Israel's short history has conditioned its leaders to believe that their country's only security lies in repeatedly demonstrating to the Arabs their military inferiority to Israel. "To maintain peace," said one Israeli official last week as if by rote, "we have to wage a war against Arab terrorism." But then, more reflectively, he added: "Yet every time we win a battle in that war, the world treats us like losers. It is a deadly dilemma."

The dilemma may, in fact, be even more deadly than the Israelis care to admit publicly. At the heart of it lies the increasingly evident fact that no degree of military superiority is likely to win for Israel the thing it most covets—the recognition by its Arab neighbors of Israel's right to exist. Yet unless the Arab states extend that recognition, Israel will live in ever more deadly peril, for it seems inevitable that the Arabs, who already outnumber the Israelis 44 to 1, will eventually begin to move toward technological and military parity with Israel. In short, the strategy of the Palestinian terrorists, which is based on the conviction that against the Israelis, has a certain ugly rationality.

Impose: It also has ominous implications for the world as a whole. In a recent review of the world scene, Richard Nixon's foreign-policy advisers somberly concluded that the Middle East could well become Mr. Nixon's Vietnam. Similar apprehensions are shared by Moscow, whose diplomats were busy last week seeking support for the imposition of a peace settlement in the Middle East by outside powers. And from a wide variety of governments, including those of France and Britain, came cautious endorsements of the concept of an imposed settlement—whether by the Security Council, the Big Four or simply by Moscow and Washington acting in concert.

So far, however, the Israeli Government has obdurately rejected any such notion and last week, in what was likely to prove his final press conference as Secretary of State, Dean Rusk pointedly noted that "it is for those nations which confront each other in the area . . . to construct the foundations for peace."

But even as Rusk spoke, what he



Exploiting mutual vulnerability

called "the cycle of violence" in the Middle East showed every sign of continuing. In a visit to [illegible] Shmona, which was twice shelled from Lebanese territory last week, Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan ominously promised that his government would soon "put an end to the situation." Meantime, the Palestinian guerrillas, visibly emboldened by the world censure of Israel, proclaimed plans to mount terrorist attacks against Israelis everywhere in the world. "We will start killing their ambassadors," boasted one Palestinian. "Let's see if they can find any of ours to kill."

Make Them Quake!

Standing amid the ruins of Karameh, the commando headquarters wrecked during an Israeli raid across the Jordan River last March, a skinny, bearded young Arab in camouflage khakis and wrinkled *kaffiyeh* outlined the guerrillas' grand strategy. "We know that we can't defeat Israel by ourselves," he said. "But we can create an atmosphere so explosive that sooner or later the Arab states and Israel will plunge into another war. The Arabs may lose again. But that won't matter, because we will prod them or the Israelis into another round a few years later. Ours is a war of attrition in which we Palestinians cannot lose."

Bold words—especially since, by all conventional standards, the ragtag Arab guerrilla forces now in the field are no match for the coldly efficient professionals of the Israeli Army. Yet, with each passing week, the strategy of the Palestinian terrorists becomes more and more plausible.

Today there are 27 Arab organizations engaged in guerrilla warfare against Israel. Their total fighting strength, according to Israeli intelligence, is only about 3,000 men. But they have hundreds of thousands of civilian sympathizers—many in the former Arab territories now occupied by Israel. More important, they have a pool of a million and a half Palestinian refugees from which to draw recruits. And four of the 27 Arab terrorist groups are currently conducting operations of some importance. They are:

■ **Al-Fatah.** By far the largest and most effective of the Arab guerrilla groups, Al-Fatah was created in the mid-1950s with Syrian backing, but operates almost exclusively from bases in Jordan. Al-Fatah's leader, a Jerusalem-born Palestinian refugee named Yasir Arafat, has become a popular hero—and a major political power—throughout the Arab world. The quiet, amiable Arafat, who goes by the code name Abu Amar, was trained as an engineer at Cairo University and later as a demolitions expert by the Egyptian Army. In 1956 he fought with Egyptian forces during the Suez invasion. Surprisingly, Arafat is the first guerrilla leader to enjoy a reasonably good reputation outside the Arab world—largely because of his ability to project the image of a [illegible] moderate. "We are not against the Jews," he says. "When we achieve victory, we will never throw anybody in the sea. We will do our best to find a humane solution for all problems."

■ **The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.** The product of the 1967 merger of several small Arab terrorist groups, the Popular Front is based in Beirut. Commanded by a former Syrian Army captain named Ahmad Jibril, it has training camps scattered throughout Lebanon in Palestinian refugee villages. Its most notable achievements to date have been the diversion of an El Al jetliner to Algeria last July and the attack upon an El Al 707 at Athens airport two weeks ago.

■ **The Palestine Liberation Organization.** Organized, trained and equipped by the Egyptians during the early 1950s, the PLO's military arm—known as the Palestine Liberation Army—originally drew most of its recruits from Palestinian refugees in the Gaza Strip. Decimated by Israeli forces in the June war, the Palestine Liberation Army is now under pressure from Nasser to merge with an Egyptian-controlled paper organization called "Heroes for the Liberation of Sinai."

■ **Thunderbolt.** Created in November 1967 when several Syrian terrorist groups joined forces, Thunderbolt (known in Arabic as Saiga) is entirely Syrian-controlled and equipped. The smallest of the four active groups, Saiga is widely disliked in the Arab world because of its extreme anti-Nasser orientation and its close ties to the most fanatic elements in the Syrian Baath Party.

Just how much physical damage all these groups have inflicted on Israel is a matter of debate. The Al-Fatah command says that, as of last week, its forces have raided 140 Israeli settlements and killed or wounded 3,700 Israeli soldiers —all at a cost of only 189 guerrillas killed and another 170 missing in action. Israeli sources dismiss these claims as "garbage." According to their tally sheet, all the Arab guerrilla groups combined have killed only 150 Israeli soldiers and 47 civilians since the 1967 war. In return, the Israelis claim to have killed 600 infiltrators and to have captured 1,500 others.

But the numbers, whatever they may be, do not tell the whole story. So far, Arab terrorism has not done any visible damage to the Israeli economy. But it has introduced a palpable tension into daily life in Israel—and hence into the psyche of Israeli politicians.

All that has prevented this tension from exploding even more dangerously than it did at Beirut airport two weeks ago has been the remarkable success of the Israeli Army in coping with the terrorist assaults. Last week, sitting in his office in Tel Aviv, one of Israel's top generals explained the strategy his troops [illegible] months immediately after the six-day war," he recalled, "the terrorists tried to establish secure bases [in the occupied territories] within the west bank. But we had solid intelligence on their movements and by using observation planes and combined helicopter and infantry search-and-destroy missions, we drove them out of there and back across the river into Jordan. There, they established big bases and began trying to build up a fighting force. But we foresaw that they would soon mount operations of some scale, so we sent armor, motorized infantry and planes across the river. On March 21, we smashed their major base at Karameh. They shifted their base to Salt, and on Aug. 4 we went in and destroyed that. Since those actions, the terrorists have been driven further back from the river. They have only small bases, a dozen men here, a dozen men there. And they move them every few days. Under such circumstances, it is almost impossible for them to get proper training. And it is very difficult for them to mount any sizable operations."

Just how efficient the Israelis have become at the deadly cat-and-mouse game raging along the cease-fire lines is apparent from the number of infiltrators now in Israeli prison camps. Last week, NEWSWEEK's Michael Elkins interviewed one young Arab who had been taken prisoner near Jericho just before Christmas. Sitting in the interrogation room of an Israeli police station, Hussein Umar Abu-Hashi, a soft-spoken 17-year-old guerrilla, told his story: "I was born at the Balata Refugee Camp near Nablus," he said. "My parents, three brothers and my sister are still there. I left Nablus last July and crossed the river to Amman to find work. In Amman, an Arab who called himself Guevara told me that if I didn't want to be drafted into the Jordanian Army for two years, I should join the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. I joined and was taken to a house near Salt. There were 26 recruits there. For a month we trained in nearby fields, learning to use rifles, submachine guns, bazookas and grenades."

Surrender: After a squabble between the Popular Front people and Al-Fatah representatives, Abu-Hashi and twelve other recruits quit the Popular Front and joined Al-Fatah. In mid-December, after one abortive raid that never got across the river, a new leader who called himself Gamal Hafez (after an Egyptian officer who was killed in 1955 while leading a terrorist squad into Israel) took command of the unit and told his men that they were going "to the Jerusalem area." The guerrillas were given Russian-made Kalashnikov automatic rifles, hand grenades and TNT. That night Jordanian Army officers guided them to the edge of the Jordan and they crossed the river

on inflated inner tubes. At dawn, they [illegible] and headed for Jerusalem. "At 10 o'clock," Abu-Hashi told Elkins, "I saw helicopters circling and I knew the Israelis had discovered us. When they started closing in, we hid in a cave. Later, someone shouted in Arabic through a loudspeaker, calling on us to surrender and saying the Israelis had promised not to hurt us. I recognized the voice; it was that of our leader, Gamal Hafez, who had already surrendered."

Then Elkins cabled this postscript: "I [illegible] handcuffed, his eyes fixed on the rubber-soled shoes that had once proudly marked him in Amman as a member of Al-Fatah. With real sadness, I asked him: 'What did you and the others plan to do in Jerusalem?'" The answer came in a whisper. "We were going to blow up houses and make sabotage," he said slowly. "I know that killing isn't right. But my leaders said the Jews must be made to quake."

NEWSWEEK
20 January 1969

Pawns No More

Near the Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem last week, a half-blind, fez-capped clothing vendor threw his hands into the air and screamed at an American reporter: "To hell with Hussein and all the other Arabs! To hell with the Israelis! We want to be ourselves, to govern ourselves and solve our misery once and for all!"

Amid all the blasts and counterblasts of Middle Eastern politics, the peddler's emotional outburst struck what may have been the most significant note. For the festering struggle between Israelis and Arabs is no longer solely a conflict between sovereign states. A new element has been added: an international "nation" composed of 1.5 million dispossessed Palestinian Arabs. Hapless pawns for most of the twenty years since the founding of Israel and well into their second generation as rootless refugees, the Palestinians are now, quite literally, beginning to call the shots in the Middle East. As a result, the fearful complexities of the Middle Eastern dilemma have been rendered still more intricate—and the hope of finding a peaceful solution to that dilemma rendered still fainter.

Exodus: It has been years since the Palestinians counted for anything in the balance of power. When the first Arab-Israeli war erupted in 1948, the Palestinians sacrificed whatever chance they might have had to influence the future course of the Jewish state by fleeing the country in the hundreds of thousands. Whether they were forced to leave or went of their own will is still a subject of bitter dispute. Arab propagandists insist that the exodus was touched off in April 1948 when the Irgun Zvei Leumi, a Jewish terrorist organization, attacked the village of Deir Yassin near Jerusalem and massacred more than 200 of its inhabitants. (In its outrage, Israel shortly thereafter suppressed the Irgun.) Israelis, on the other hand, argue that the Arab states encouraged the Palestinians to flee and, in fact, Arabs still living in Israel recall being urged to evacuate Haifa by Arab military commanders who wanted to bomb the city.

The truth, as it so often does, probably lies somewhere between these two extreme contentions. In any case, when the war ended in disaster for the Arab armies, the Palestinians found themselves in permanent exile. For the wealthier and better educated among them, this was not an unmitigated catastrophe. Composing as they did the intellectual elite of the Arab world, many Palestinians found employment in other Arab countries as journalists, teachers and business executives. A few, plunging shrewdly into the freewheeling, free-enterprising atmosphere of Lebanon, even became millionaires.

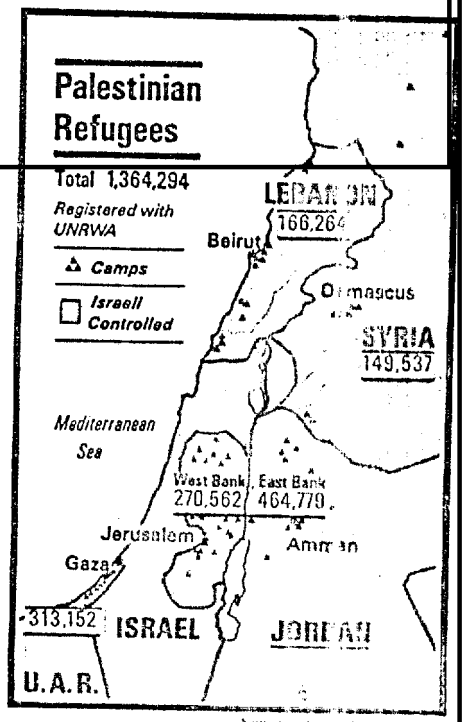
But for most Palestinians, exile meant grinding and hopeless poverty. They poured into scores of bleak, ill-equipped refugee camps in Jordan, Egypt, Syria and Lebanon—and even now fully half of all the exiles remain in such camps, their numbers constantly swelled by a soaring birth rate. Primarily, the miserable plight of the Palestinians reflects the fact that none of the Arab states has made any genuine effort to integrate the refugees. (The worst offender has been Egypt which, for economic reasons, has kept its 300,000 Palestinians penned up in a kind of ghetto in the Gaza Strip.)

Scattered as they were all over the Middle East, the Palestinians were understandably slow to develop any separate political identity. For years, the only body which claimed to represent all the refugees was the Cairo-based Palestine Liberation Organization. And, in reality, Ahmad Shukairy, the PLO's fire-breathing leader, was more interested in serving Egypt's President Nasser than in serving the Palestinian people. Although the refugees' greatest military potential clearly was for guerrilla warfare, Shukairy—on Nasser's orders—created a parade-happy regular force. And in the 1967 war, this "army" was among the first of the Arab forces to be destroyed.

Defeat: The 1967 debacle—which brought all that remained of the former Palestinian homeland under Israeli rule—disillusioned many refugees with Shukairy, Nasser and the Arab governments in general. "Do you realize what the Jordanians have done?" fumed one Palestinian at the time. "They handed over the West Bank—all that was left of our country—in 24 hours. One day's fighting was all that a million Palestinians were worth to them. We still hate the Israelis, but we're through with the Arabs."

"We either had to do something drastic or fade away," echoes another Palestinian. The decision was for something drastic—and it was spearheaded by Al-Fatah, a commando group that had never believed in depending on the other Arabs. Only a few days after the end of the June war, Al-Fatah's leaders, headed by Yasir Arafat, an Egyptian-trained demolition expert, met in Amman to ponder their next move. "We agreed," a participant in the meeting recalled last week, "that the war was another proof that a head-on collision gives Israel the advantage of speed and superior technology. So we decided to gear up for a long guerrilla struggle." And the avowed object of that struggle was to force Israel into another war with the Arab states—and another and another, if necessary.

So far, the strategy has worked ominously well. Had it not been for the Palestinian guerrillas, the Middle East would have been virtually at peace for the last eighteen months. Except for a few incidents at the Suez Canal, all of Israel's major retaliations—including the raid on Beirut airport [illegible] been made



in response [illegible] rillas. And all this the guerrillas have achieved against the strong opposition of most Arab governments. "The Palestinians," one Western diplomat in Amman concludes, "are now a state within a state." It is, in fact, clear that, if they wished, the guerrillas could easily overthrow the governments of at least two Arab countries—Lebanon and Jordan.

Dignity: Their new sense of power and purpose has done much to restore the Palestinians' injured dignity—and dignity is enormously important to an Arab. "We have yet to learn how to win," declares one commando, "but we've already become experts at refusing to be defeated. We'll advance further, because there isn't a Palestinian alive who wants to see his children go through the same [illegible] life that he has had."

[illegible] dared to suggest that their people should make peace independently with Israel in order to obtain territory for a new Palestinian nation. "If the Jews come up with a half-acceptable proposal, we will make a deal with them," said one influential Palestinian not long ago. But what the vast majority of Palestinians still seem to thirst for is not peace but revenge. Nor is it likely that even the most conciliatory Palestinians would make an offer that the Israeli Government might seriously consider. "If they had realistic terms, we could talk to them," Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban told NEWSWEEK's Michael Elkins last week. "But I haven't met or been told of a single Palestinian Arab representative who has a proposal that comes within miles of [illegible] we hear from them . . . is, 'How about going back to 1947?' "

Still, Israel must now reckon with the fact that her most intransigent enemies in the Arab world are beginning to emerge as a serious bargaining force. Quite possibly, the Palestinians will never achieve enough cohesiveness to play the kind of leading role among the Arabs that Nasser did before 1967. But that, after all, is not essential to their overriding purpose of provoking another Arab-Israeli war. And it is even less essential to their secondary aim—which, as one Al-Fatah leader recently noted, is to insure that "from now on, all the mistakes the Arabs may make in their fight with Israel will be Palestinian mistakes."

NEWSWEEK
27 January 1969

Safer but Sadder

With the end of the 1967 war in the Middle East, the Suez Canal abruptly ceased to be one of the world's great arteries of transportation and instead became a watery no man's land: a useless ditch across which Egyptian and Israeli troops glowered at each other—and all too often shot at each other. One by one, as their inhabitants fled to safer areas, the population centers along the canal—Ismailia, Suez and West Qantara—became ghost towns. And now, the last canal town still retaining a spark of civilian life was also dying. From Israeli-held East Qantara last week, NEWSWEEK's Michael Elkins cabled this obituary:

Once a main junction on the railroad that runs through the Sinai Peninsula to the Gaza Strip, Qantara used to be a prosperous town of 29,000 people. But in June 1967 when Israeli troops burst into the eastern half of the city, which straddles the canal, all but 855 of its occupants took refuge in Egyptian-held territory. And life for the relative handful of people who chose to remain in East Qantara was both hard and dangerous; there was no work for the men, no schools for the children—and the constant threat of sudden death from Egyptian artillery batteries which occasionally opened up on East Qantara from the other side of the canal.

Last week, the Israelis decided to make life safer for East Qantara's wretched residents by moving them, willy-nilly, deep into the Sinai to the town of El Arish. In the process, in a paradox characteristic of our time, the Israelis not only made life safer for the people of Qantara; they also made it sadder.

Hovels: The actual moving went off smoothly enough. Traveling in buses, and accompanied by trucks carrying their possessions, twenty families at a time were brought across the desert to their new homes. The physical facilities in El Arish—mostly hovels, many without toilets and some without windows—are no better and no worse than the homes the evacuees left behind in Qantara. But in one important respect, life in El Arish will be far better; unlike Qantara, there will be jobs for all those who want to work.

The Israeli colonel who governs El Arish, in fact, made the evacuation of Qantara sound almost like a blessing. "I make a wish," he said, "that Jews in the Arab countries should be done to by the authorities there as I am doing to these people." Which was fair enough. But still, as I stood in the dusty main street of El Arish, watching the frightened men, the crying children and the fearful eyes peering out from above the face shawls of Qantara's women, I could not quite accept the colonel's statement as the final verdict on the death of East Qantara.

That, instead, was supplied by the one English-speaking Qantaran whom I met, a former railway clerk named Ahmed Ibrahim Shalabi. "We all wanted to leave Qantara because of the shooting," said Shalabi, who, together with his wife and eight children, had been living in three tiny rooms. "If we have work here we can be happy." Then, however, he shrugged, stared off toward the western horizon and added: "But we will live for the day we can return to our homes."

Diminishing Ditch

Whatever else the evacuation of Qantara achieved, it served to demonstrate once again a central element of Israel's current political strategy: to hang onto control of the east bank of the Suez Canal until the Arab states show themselves ready to pay a stiff diplomatic price for the canal's reopening. So far, however, this strategy has not worked; far from knuckling under, Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser has, in his turn, made reopening of the canal contingent upon a complete Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula. As a result unless either Jerusalem or Cairo radically alters its position, the canal seems destined to remain closed for a long time to come.

There was a day when this prospect would have caused consternation in the West. But now, although the Western powers led by the U.S. would like to see the canal reopened for diplomatic reasons, they no longer regard it as a matter of supreme economic importance.

The Suez Canal, in short, is no longer the formidable instrument of Egyptian foreign policy that it was back in 1956. Then, when Nasser closed the canal in the aftermath of the Suez invasion, the impact on the economy of Western Europe was enormous. Shipping costs spiraled and, with oil deliveries from the Middle East severely curtailed, the fuel-hungry nations of Western Europe had to submit to oil rationing. So critical was the situation, in fact, that in 1957 the Western nations, including Israel's French and British allies, were driven to pressure the Israelis into withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

Diversion: Since the 1967 war, however, it has become clear that the canal as an instrument of economic warfare against the West—and hence against Israel—is no longer so effective. With fuel from the newly blossoming fields in Libya and Algeria flowing into European markets, oil sources are now far more diverse than they were in 1956. Even Britain, which got 60 per cent of its oil supplies through the canal at the time of the 1956 crisis, received only 25 per cent by that route in 1966.

At the same time, shippers have switched from the canal to other shipping lanes with a minimum of dislocation. Iraq and Iran now send much of their Europe-bound cargo via railroad. Western shippers, in turn, have taken to using air transport from Beirut to satisfy many of their Middle Eastern markets. Most important of all, the rapid emergence of the supertankers, which now carry the bulk of the oil produced in the Persian Gulf around the southern tip of Africa, has helped to minimize the impact of the

canal's closure on the West.

It is a major irony, in fact, that the bottling up of the Suez Canal is doing more damage to Nasser's friends than to his foes. India and Pakistan, both of which normally support Egypt diplomatically, have been seriously hurt by the higher cost of shipping wheat and fertilizer from the U.S. and Europe now that they can no longer use the canal. And the Soviet Union, Cairo's chief ally and military supplier, has been frustrated in a number of ways. The closure of the canal has made it virtually impossible to supply the Soviet naval base at Hodeida in Yemen and thus has impeded Moscow's efforts to establish a strong naval presence in the Indian Ocean. And shipments of Soviet military hardware to North Vietnam must now go around Africa or make the long trip by train.

The Victim: Hardest hit by the closing of the Suez Canal, however, is Egypt itself. Thousands of Egyptians are out of work as a result of the canal's inactivity. And though the oil-rich potentates of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Libya are giving Cairo $266 million a year to compensate for the loss of canal tolls, there are important political strings attached to this dole. In return, Nasser has had to pull his troops out of Yemen, silence the rabidly anti-royalist radio station known as the Voice of Cairo, and look on helplessly as the Shah of Iran and Saudi Arabia's King Faisal forge an alliance designed to freeze Egypt out of the Persian Gulf. "The closing of the canal this time," says one Western diplomat in Cairo, "has finished off Nasser as a Pan-Arab leader."

It may also have finished off the Suez Canal as the world's most important waterway. If and when the canal is finally reopened, smaller shippers will surely still find it convenient. But the major shippers of the world, twice bitten by canal closings and unwilling to gamble on Middle Eastern politics yet again, show every intention of putting their major emphasis on the development of supertankers and dry-bulk supercarriers—mammoth ships that the Suez Canal could not accommodate unless enormous sums were invested in deepening it. As a consequence, some shipping experts go as far as to predict that in the 1980s the Suez Canal may be destined to go the way of the Erie Canal—remaining rich in history but slipping into relative insignificance economically.