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The Palestine Liberation Army

1. The Palestine Liberation Army (PLA) is a product of the most recent Arab efforts to provide tangible political and military expression for Palestinian Arab hostility against Israel. The PLA is the military arm of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which was established in 1964 by the League of Arab States.

2. Thus far this "army" essentially exists only on paper. It is being organized primarily as a commando force. There are some units--reportedly totaling about 8,000 troops--in the armies of Egypt, Syria, and Iraq which have been officially attached to the PLA, which is nominally under the command and operational control of the Egyptian-dominated United Arab Command of the Arab League. These lines of command are fuzzy, however, and the PLA-designated units still appear to be integral parts of their host armies.

3. The PLA does not presently threaten Israel except as a reservoir for potential saboteurs and terrorists. Even in this respect, it has not been involved in incidents along the Israeli border as have other unrelated and more aggressive Palestinian groups, such as the Syria-backed "Fatah" terrorists. Indeed, the status and plans of the PLA have become subjects of dispute among the Arab states, especially between Egypt and Jordan.

4. Jordan opposes the PLO and its plans for organizing separate Palestinian army units in Jordan, arguing that Palestinians there already are serving in the Jordanian Army. King Husayn essentially views the PLA as a potential subversive threat to Jordan rather than as a menace to Israel, even though, as an Arab leader, he supports the general Palestinian claim against Israel.

5. Both the PLA and its parent organization, the PLO, receive budget support through the Arab League from contributions by member states. According to the Jordanian press, in September 1964 the League allocated some seven million pounds sterling (nearly \$20 million) to the PLA. Egypt, Syria, and Iraq are the PLA's most active individual supporters, but the extent of their aid is unclear. At various times Shuqayri has publicly criticized delinquent Arab states for failing to contribute. The PLO also is endeavoring, with little evident success, to levy a "liberation tax" on all Palestinians, including the more than one million refugees who are scattered among the Arab states. Shuqayri has stated that the PLO hopes to transform the refugee camps into military training centers.

6. Outside of the Arab world, the PLO has solicited support--presumably financial as well as political and material aid--from the Soviet Union and Communist China, and from "nonaligned" states in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Only Peking appears to have responded in a substantial way, however. The PLO claims that some of its army personnel have received guerrilla training in China. Earlier this year Shuqayri announced that Palestinians would also be trained in Vietnam, where they would study the tactics of the Viet Cong. Shuqayri clearly envisages the PLA as a force which should be developed along the lines of the Viet Cong.

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