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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
28 November 1971

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Implications of Wasfi Tal's Assassination

1. Jordanian Prime Minister Wasfi Tal's assassination in Cairo on Sunday will intensify the already stormy atmosphere within the Arab world. At the very least, relations between Cairo and Amman--perennially strained, but somewhat improved of late--will take a sharp turn for the worse. Damascus, too, may come in for a share of the blame.

2. The incident will again turn the spotlight on the status of the Palestinians in the Arab world, and particularly in Jordan. Three of Tal's assailants--there may have been as many as seven, according to press reports--have been caught.

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[Redacted] [Redacted]  
An unidentified woman apparently telephoned the press in Cairo claiming that a Palestinian commando group called the "Black September" organization--a reference to last September's civil war in Jordan--was responsible. This

25X1

3. There is little doubt that fedayeen of some stripe are responsible for the slaying, although there may have been others involved--either Jordanian politicians who have long been maneuvering for Tal's job, or Egyptians with decades-old hostility to Tal, or both. A Syrian connection is less likely, although individual Syrians working on their own may have participated.

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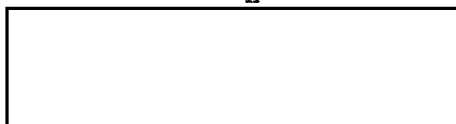
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4. Interrogation of the captured assailants is being handled by the Egyptian security officials, perhaps with less enthusiasm than their Jordanian counterparts. The Jordanians will certainly bend every effort to ascertain precisely which group or groups of fedayeen are responsible, and an immediate campaign will be launched to round up members. Unless more precise knowledge develops we can expect round-ups of underground fedayeen and Palestinians within Jordan--although there is a good chance that the people responsible are based in Beirut or Damascus; Jordan has lacked a favorable climate for fedayeen operations since July. Tal's death will upset the Jordanian army, which had considerable admiration for his hard-nosed policy towards the fedayeen, but it will not arouse the kind of wholesale vengeance-seeking that the assassination of the King or the Crown Prince would have provoked. There seems to be no reason to expect a bloodbath.

5. Tal's departure from the scene is unlikely to result in any significant shift of policy within Jordan. The King is not likely to appoint as the new Prime Minister any of Tal's political rivals--particularly if he has any suspicion that they might have had a hand in his death. This would eliminate Bahjat Talhuni and Abd al-Munim Rifai, who have been angling to replace Tal for the past year, from the political scene for the immediate future; their names had been frequently raised as candidates for the premiership that would be more acceptable to the Palestinians. Tal's successor will either share the hard-line approach to the



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fedayeen of both Tal and the King, or will be a colorless figurehead

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The line against the fedayeen will be more rigidly held than ever; no event could have been better calculated to confirm to the King the rightness of his previous policies. If anything, the King and his counselors will be tempted to take the offensive against more radical commando leaders;



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6. Like the hijackings to Dawson's Landing in September 1970, the assassination of Tal will serve to tarnish further the image of the fedayeen in the public eye. Some sympathy will automatically flow towards the Jordanian government; it might even be strong enough to give Syria a pretext for reopening its border with Jordan, something which Syria was supposedly on the verge of doing in any event. Should pro-Jordanian sentiments prevail in the Arab world for any length of time, the event might even induce the Kuwaitis to renew their subsidies to Jordan. Much depends, however, on actions taken by the Jordanian government in the immediate future. An instinctive heavy-handed crackdown on Palestinians and Jordan's few remaining fedayeen or a punitive raid into Syria could reverse the flow of sympathy and turn Husayn once again into a popular villain.

7. Tal's death seems certain to write an end to negotiations between the Jordanian government and the fedayeen aimed at permitting the commandos some kind of official status within the country. These negotiations have dragged on for months and the latest round broke up only on Friday; there was little chance of an agreement at best. The assassination will give the Jordanians a better reason in Arab eyes for continuing the hard line they have



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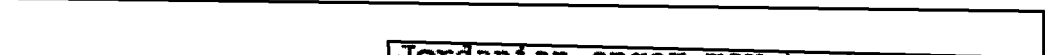


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been taking all along; the government can argue that so long as the fedayeen are operating primarily against Jordan, and not against "the enemy," Israel, the government can not reasonably be expected to facilitate their task. If the event results in an upsurge of sympathy for Jordan, the country's previous position of outsider in pan-Arab circles may be somewhat improved. Again, Jordan's own reactions may be the crucial factor.

8. Relations between Jordan and Egypt will in part depend on how much cooperation Cairo gives Amman in the days ahead. Tal was notorious as a foe of Egypt, and particularly of President Nasir; he blamed Nasir's socialist, Arab nationalist movement as responsible for the Egyptian errors of the last twenty years and the present plight of the Arab world. A right-wing autocrat himself, Tal had no use for any of the "progressive" socialist governments of the Middle East but his hatred was focused on Nasir's Egypt because Nasir was the dominant force in the area yet was a failure as a dictator. Tal had a much better opinion of Egyptian President Sadat, but his appointment as Prime Minister was strongly opposed by Cairo and has been a bone of contention between the two countries for the past thirteen months. Egypt is unlikely to have had a hand in the plot, which could upset Sadat's own programs and timetables, but King Husayn will blame Cairo at least for improper security precautions. There seems to be little hope that the King's planned trip to Cairo--which was to mark the dawn of better relations between the two countries--will come off.

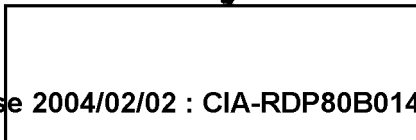
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 Jordanian anger may be turned against Damascus as well; it was already inflamed by another killing incident near the Syrian border on 27 November. The effect is unlikely to last, however. Tal's relations with senior Syrian officials had been by and large good, despite the border clashes between the two countries last August and the closure of Syria's border to Jordanian goods. There are ties by marriage between high officials in both countries,

25X1



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10. The most important effect of the event on the pan-Arab atmosphere will be to complicate any kind of coordinated Arab approach to the general problem of pursuing political solutions with Israel or preparing for war. President Sadat of Egypt has been trying to hammer out an agreed policy on dealing with Israel through the United Nations and on preparing for the "battle" which he says is now inevitable. This was the reason for the defense ministers' meeting in Cairo which Tal was attending when he was shot. Sadat presumably had hoped to have King Husayn's public acquiescence in his diplomatic efforts before the General Assembly debate, and he still needs someone to man the Eastern Front against Israel. At a minimum, the assassination will be a distraction from Sadat's scenario, although a delay may not be unwelcome to him. If the assassination sets off another cycle of inter-Arab hostility, he will find it harder still to confront Israel and the great powers with a believable threat of united Arab action.

