

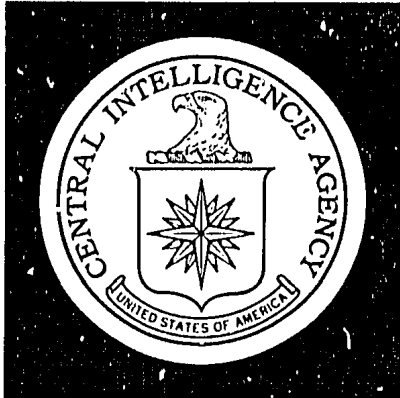
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MEMORANDUM

OFFICE OF
NATIONAL ESTIMATES

The Fedayeen - Politics of Spoiling

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

26 October 1972

MEMORANDUM^{*}

SUBJECT: The Fedayeen -- Politics of Spoiling

1. The spectacular terrorist attack against Israeli athletes in Munich in September and the massacre at Lod airport in May are examples of still another turn in the tortuous course of Palestinian fedayeen activity. The commandos had been on the defensive since their defeat by the Jordanian army in 1970 and their virtual expulsion from Jordan in 1971. They had lost the support of the public, Palestinians included. Developments in Jordan seriously damaged their capability to operate in the Arab world as well as in Israel, for Egypt and Syria have long imposed strict controls on operations against Israel from their

* *This memorandum was prepared by the Office of National Estimates and discussed with other components of the CIA who are in general agreement with its judgments.*

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territory. In the wake of Israeli raids against fedayeen areas in Lebanon, the Beirut government too has tightened restrictions on the guerrillas. In recent months extremists have gained influence among the fedayeen and more and more guerrillas have come to see terrorist operations outside Israel as their only remaining weapon. The new tactics have, in fedayeen eyes, been successful. This paper examines the implications of their growing resort to terror.

The Black September Organization

2. The most notable manifestation of the trend toward terrorism has been the Black September Organization -- whose name derives from the date of King Husayn's defeat of the fedayeen in Jordan. Like the bulk of the Palestinian population, Black September fears that a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict would involve Arab concessions at the expense of the Palestinians. Black September goes further in believing that, through fostering acts of violence against King Husayn and his government as well as against Israel and its international supporters (principally the US), tension can be increased and the chances of negotiations reduced.

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3. There is still much we do not know about this group, which practices a high order of security. Its leadership is closely intertwined with that of Fatah. Indeed, it appears that Black September is simply a cover name that allows Fatah -- the largest and heretofore relatively most moderate guerrilla organization -- to disclaim responsibility for terrorist operations carried out by its members. While some question remains about the degree of control which Fatah's leaders have over Black September operations, there can be no doubt that they are aware of its plans. Black September apparently lacks formal structure and recruits teams for specific operations from the membership of various fedayeen groups as well as from Arab emigres and even non-Arabs. This provides the organization a large reservoir of potential recruits beyond a small core membership.

Outside Assistance

4. The Arab terrorists have established links with extremist organizations outside of the Arab world. Japanese sympathizers from the "Red Army Faction" have been trained at fedayeen camps in Syria and Lebanon;

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a contingent of these carried out the massacre at Lod airport at the end of May 1972.

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Members of the Eritrean Liberation Front and Iranian terrorists have also received training in the commando camps. Some exploratory contacts may have been made with a wing of the Irish Republican Army. It would appear, however, that as yet relationships between the fedayeen and other national extremist groups have been principally on an *ad hoc* basis. But despite increased international security arrangements which may make it more difficult to operate, their common dilemma may encourage some of these organizations to collaborate with the fedayeen.

5. The fedayeen have had little return from their lengthy efforts to obtain direct support from the Soviets. The USSR has long provided arms to some guerrilla organizations through the governments of Egypt, Syria, and Iraq. This aid has contributed to terrorist operations, but the Kremlin is uncomfortable about terrorism and has found

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direct contact with the guerrillas embarrassing. The fedayeen's growing turn toward terrorism of the Munich and Lod variety will probably make Moscow even more wary. At the UN in September Foreign Minister Gromyko explicitly condemned terrorist actions which culminated in Munich. Thus while Yasir Arafat and others have made several trips to Moscow to seek arms and assistance, the Soviets have not provided the requested aid. Instead they warned the fedayeen not to embark on hijackings and assassinations and have encouraged Arafat to line up the guerrillas behind a moderate approach.

6. Peking, for its part, has supplied some direct assistance to the fedayeen. Although the Chinese in the past have attempted to discourage the guerrillas from using terrorist tactics outside of Israel, some who received training in China have been involved in such operations. Military aid from China has been small in scale, consisting primarily of small arms and ammunition. Indeed, Chinese support for the fedayeen has not been of major significance.

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Israeli Reaction

7. The Israeli government has decided that the emphasis by the fedayeen on spectacular acts of terrorism requires new methods on Israel's part. Mrs. Meir has announced what amounts to a policy of striking at the fedayeen without waiting for a prior incident. Tel Aviv has always believed that forceful reaction against guerrilla bases located in neighboring Arab states would both discourage the fedayeen and, more important, induce the Arab host governments themselves to move against the commandos. The Israelis see King Husayn's blows against the guerrillas in 1970 and 1971 and present Lebanese restrictions on the fedayeen as the fruit of their forceful retaliation. Tel Aviv obviously hopes that anticipatory strikes will have even greater effect.

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Outlook

9. The terrorists have achieved some of the aims of their recent series of spectacular acts. The attack in Munich at the time of the Olympics got them the spotlight they were seeking. It went some way toward demonstrating that the fedayeen were willing to do more than just talk against Israel. This gave the flagging guerrilla movement a shot in the arm, substantially raising the morale of the commandos. Also of great importance from Fatah's point of view, the recent wave of terrorism and the major Israeli

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retaliation it provoked further embittered Arab-Israeli relations. It further isolated Jordan, which alone of the Arab governments forthrightly condemned the terrorists. And finally, the fedayeen succeeded in shifting world attention from efforts to promote a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict to international efforts to combat terrorism.

10. The terrorists are clearly going to want to continue the kind of activity which has won them this much. But their ability to do so and the rate at which they can proceed will depend on a number of factors. They will be much affected by the degree of encouragement -- or discouragement -- they receive from Arab governments. For in the final analysis they require the toleration if not the active support of at least a few Arab regimes. Israeli retaliation may also influence the course of terrorist activity, as will international measures to combat it. A number of states have taken stiff measures to restrict and scrutinize Arab travelers. Inevitably this will complicate plans for further terrorism. But it will not take much to keep the terrorist organizations alive. And a daring feat from time to time which evoked publicity and

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response from the Israelis and/or the Arab governments would no doubt be sufficient to maintain momentum in the terrorist movement.

11. To date, most of the terrorist operations have struck against Israelis or Jordanians. The bombing of the partly American-owned trans-Alpine oil terminal at Trieste in August and the letter-bomb campaign, however, show that the guerrillas are determined to be more far ranging. In the future, therefore, the fedayeen may look for opportunities to hit US diplomatic installations and/or kidnap or kill American officials around the world, perhaps even in the US. It is equally possible that they will seek to sabotage American oil installations abroad or perhaps overseas US military facilities where they judge security lax. Indeed, it would be surprising if the terrorists did not soon attempt a spectacular operation directed primarily against the US.

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14. Fedayeen pride in the success of spectacular acts of terrorism will not induce greater cooperation among the rival guerrilla groups. Instead, Black September successes may spur the Front for the Liberation of Palestine and other splinter groups to step up their own terrorist efforts in order to boost their own prestige. Even within Fatah itself, the rise of Black September is proving unsettling. It is strengthening the extremists in Fatah who have long been pressing Arafat for greater influence. The Black September Organization will almost inevitably play a larger role in making Fatah policy. If the Black September leaders clash with the wider leadership in Fatah, they may even split off to form a wholly independent body. In any event, the growing

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influence of the extremist faction will weaken the position of Yasir Arafat, who is already under fire for the failures in Jordan. It is not clear who would emerge if Arafat were actually displaced, but the chances of change in Fatah's leadership are growing.

15. Continuing recourse to terror by the fedayeen will breed counter-terror by their opponents. Some Israelis themselves have frequently been tempted to retaliate in kind, particularly when they concluded that regular military operations were not enough reply to the terrorists.

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16. *In sum*, despite their defeat in conventional military encounters with Israel and in confrontations with Husayn, the fedayeen have shown that they cannot be counted out of the Middle East equation. They are certainly not

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likely to make much headway in weakening the Israeli position in the Arab-Israeli conflict. But they still can play -- and are playing -- a spoiling role, in respect of negotiations toward a settlement. For they are able to provoke both the Arab governments, and especially the Israelis, into reactions that further embitter the conflict. And they are able to concentrate the attention of the outside world on themselves rather than on parties to the conflict who are willing to entertain thoughts of compromise.

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