



Directorate of  
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**Near East and  
South Asia Review**



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**Supplement  
23 October 1987**

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*23 October 1987*

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**Near East and South Asia Review** [Redacted]

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**Supplement**

23 October 1987

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	[Redacted]		25X1

The murder of the Fatah Force 17 commander for Lebanon last August by Force 17 rivals dramatically demonstrates the intensity of the power struggles prevailing within Fatah. The struggles are likely to continue as PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat plays one leader against another in a calculated effort to preserve his own leadership position. [Redacted]

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*Some articles in Near East and South Asia Review are preliminary views of a subject or speculative, but the contents normally will be coordinated as appropriate with other offices within CIA. Occasionally an article will represent the view of a single analyst; an item like this will be designated as a noncoordinated view.*

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**Near East and South Asia Review**



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**Article**

**PLO-Lebanon: Fatah Force 17 Infighting**



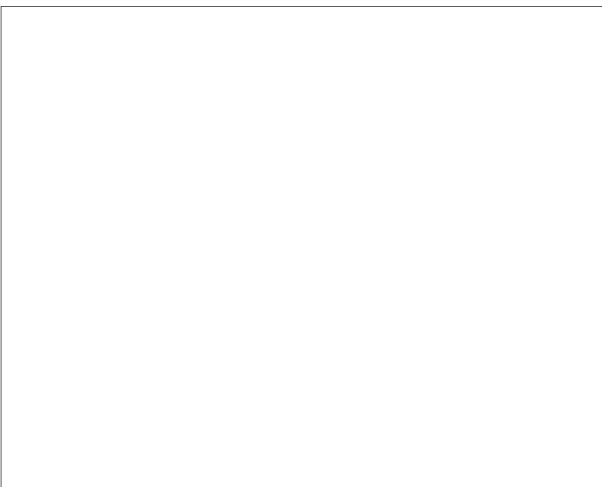
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The murder of the Fatah Force 17 commander for Lebanon last August by Force 17 rivals dramatically demonstrates the intensity of the power struggles prevailing within Fatah. The assassination has heightened feuding among Fatah cadre and caused increased concern among the Fatah leadership about Palestinian rivalries. The struggles are likely to continue as PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat plays one leader against another in a calculated effort to preserve his own leadership position.

among local Force 17 commanders who were loyal to rival Fatah leaders. The US Embassy in Amman reports that Ghul was loyal to Force 17 chief and Arafat lieutenant Abu Tayib and had been dispatched to southern Lebanon on Arafat's personal order. According to the Embassy, Shahin and Wahbeh—whom Embassy officials believe are loyal to Khalil al-Wazir (Abu Jihad), deputy commander of Fatah—decided to challenge Arafat's authority in southern Lebanon, apparently culminating with the murder of Ghul.

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The body of Lt. Col. Rasim al-Ghul, the Fatah Force 17 commander for Lebanon, was found in southern Lebanon near the Ayn al-Hilwah refugee camp in mid-August. He had been shot in the head and chest, [redacted] Dispatched to Lebanon last March, Ghul quickly came into conflict with Abu Ali Shahin and Zayd Wahbeh, commanders of two local refugee camps. A source of the US Embassy in Amman reports that Shahin and Wahbeh, using a trusted friend to lure Ghul from a wedding, kidnaped him and killed him shortly thereafter.



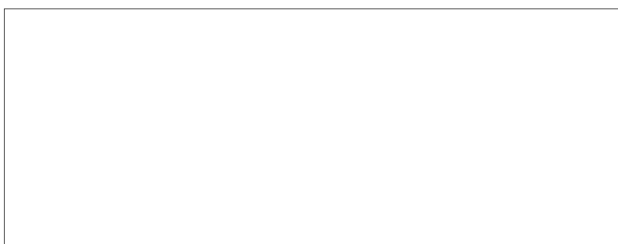
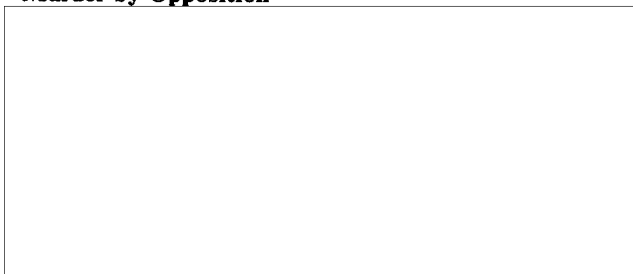
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**Murder by Opposition**



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[redacted] Ghul almost certainly was killed as a result of feuding

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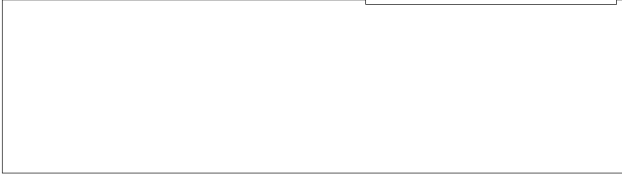


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**The Larger Struggle**

Whether Ghul's murder was the result of a conflict between Tayib and Hawari or Tayib and Wazir, it graphically underscores the intensity of the current power struggles within Fatah. Conflict between Colonel Hawari and Abu Tayib has been brewing for several months.

Hawari is supposed to be subordinate to Abu Tayib as Force 17 commander, but in practice he is not. Hawari is apparently highly regarded by Arafat and constitutes Abu Tayib's most serious PLO competition in South Lebanon.



Underlying the power struggle is a broader conflict between Arafat's autocratic leadership style and the desire of his subordinates for more independent authority. Arafat traditionally has built his political strength within the PLO by encouraging the emergence of competing power centers and then playing them against each other—in the process leaving himself in a superior position. Ghul's murder clearly was a byproduct of this tactic.

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**Prospects**

No matter how Arafat decides to respond to the conflict among his commanders in Lebanon, violent power struggles are likely to continue.

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If Arafat decides not to intervene, infighting among Fatah cadres also is likely to continue. As long as Arafat continues to play one leader against another, each will maneuver for greater independence. Given each group's easy access to small arms, these maneuverings almost certainly will continue to spill over into armed confrontations like Ghul's murder and its bloody aftermath.

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