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The Director of Central Intelligence

Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

NIC 4621-83  
24 June 1983MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence  
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

VIA: National Intelligence Officer for Warning

FROM: [redacted]  
Assistant National Intelligence Officer for NESA

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SUBJECT: Monthly Warning Meeting - June 1983

1. Implications of the PLO Infighting

Analysts concur that, whatever the origins of the so-called Fatah mutiny, it is now clear that Syria is orchestrating the anti-Arafat unrest in order to enhance further its stranglehold on the Middle East peace process. Syria is exploiting longstanding differences within Fatah and the PLO to weaken Arafat and undermine his claim to be the internationally recognized spokesman/symbol of the PLO. [redacted]

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It is unlikely that the anti-Arafat dissidents number more than a few hundred Fatah members. The Syrians have had to resort to using PFLP-GC troops and Syrian tanks in the latest clashes because their Fatah "mutineers" are too weak numerically. The Syrian goal in encouraging the dissidents to seize PLO supply routes is mostly psychological since Syria already controls the PLO's supply lines. The objective is to steadily diminish Arafat's stature and compel him to follow Syrian diktat. [redacted]

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In the near term Damascus probably does not want to oust Arafat completely. Total and explicit Syrian control over the PLO would erode its usefulness to Damascus and give Israel greater excuse to hold Syria responsible for any and all Palestinian terrorism. Rather Syria wants to clip Arafat's wings. In particular President Assad wants to be certain that the PLO will not revive the Jordanian option or deal directly with the US. Syria's objective is to remove any option from the peace process other than one that primarily serves Syrian interests. [redacted]

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There is always the danger, however, that events will force or encourage Assad and his radical Palestinian allies to go further. Assad's decision to expel Arafat from Damascus on 24 June may be a sign of this. In any case, the risk of Arafat's assassination remains high. [redacted]

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Although the other Arabs, especially Saudi Arabia and Algeria, and the Soviets have given Arafat verbal support, none have taken practical moves to help him. Arafat wants the Arabs to offer him an alternative supply route through Tripoli in northern Lebanon but no Arab state seems willing to take the risk of clashing with the Syrian forces stationed just outside Tripoli. [redacted]

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Arafat will probably seek to contain the dispute with Syria while rallying Arab and Soviet pressure. His new term goal is to preserve as much independence as possible in the Tripoli region. The local Lebanese factions in Tripoli, both pro- and anti-Syrian, are not eager to see their city turned into a PLO headquarters, however, for fear of Israeli retaliation. [redacted]

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Arafat's diminished stature and reduced room for maneuver increases the risk that he will lift the Fatah "ban" on international terrorism or, at least, take fewer steps to curb non-Fatah radicals. Such a dramatic reversal does not appear imminent but is a serious long term risk. In any case Arafat's growing weaknesses and loss of control make more terrorism by fringe groups like Black June and May 15 more likely. [redacted]

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Syria's role in supporting such international terrorist groups is becoming more evident. [redacted]

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2. Lebanon - Implications of the Guerrilla Attacks on the Israelis

The attacks on IDF units in the south are primarily the work of Lebanese leftists with some PLO support. Elements of the Shia Amal group, communists and others are involved. Attacks average 5-10 per week. Some evidence suggests PLO elements are trying to get more involved in the war of attrition especially in the Sidon area. [redacted]

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The greatest danger in the current situation is that the guerrillas will sooner or later stage a very successful raid with significant IDF casualties. [redacted]

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[redacted] There are several PLO targets, for example, that could be attacked by air or commandos without involving significantly the Syrians. [redacted]

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The longer the guerrilla war continues the more it will erode the Lebanese government's standing in the south. As leftist groups gain popular support in the area they will become barriers to the GOL's reassertion of its authority after an IDF pullback. [redacted]

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[redacted]

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3. Syrian-Soviet Ties

There is general agreement that the Soviets are likely to ship SS-21 surface-to-surface missiles to Syria this fall [redacted]. The SS-21 is an improved FROG-7 missile which will enhance Syrian long range artillery capabilities somewhat to disrupt IDF force buildups and other behind-the-lines activities. It will not, however, significantly alter the balance of power between the two sides. The decision to send the SS-21 is further evidence of Moscow's support for Assad. [redacted]

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4. Iran-Iraq War

Efforts to mediate the conflict by the GCC states have collapsed and recent Iranian propaganda clearly indicates that Tehran still believes time is on its side. Iran is pursuing a long term strategy: a war of attrition aimed at sapping Iraq's finances and its will to fight. [redacted]

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Analysts concur [redacted] that Iraq can stave off its economic problems for the remainder of 1983 but will face serious debt problems in 1984. Iraq remains frustrated by its inability to seize the initiative but numerous constraints -- especially the fears of its Gulf allies -- continue to restrain Baghdad from launching a major attack on Iran's Kharg Island oil facilities. [redacted]

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A small-scale Iranian offensive may be imminent in the central border region at Naft-e shah or Mehran. It is likely to make only limited advances since Iraq is aware of the Iranian buildup. Tehran's goal is primarily psychological, i.e. to keep the pressure on Saddam Hussein.

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5. Western Sahara: Implications of the OAU Summit Resolution

The 11 June summit resolution reaffirmed previous OAU calls for a referendum (scheduled for December) and for the first time labeled Morocco and the Polisario Front as "the parties to the dispute." The OAU also called for direct talks between Rabat and the Polisario.

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Many problems remain to be resolved before a referendum can be carried out and public Moroccan-Polisario talks are not likely any time soon. Private negotiations are a possibility, however. The key is Algeria's attitude. Algiers seems determined to pursue regional stability and economic development as its first priority and appears eager for an "honorable" Saharan solution. No dramatic breakthrough seems imminent.

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Analysts are skeptical of Libya's pronouncement that it is finished with the Saharan conflict and expects renewed Libyan meddling sooner or later. Algeria, however, will retain its dominance over the Polisario due to geographical facts.

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NIC/NIO/NESA [redacted] 24 June 83 [redacted]

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