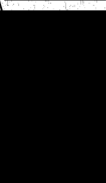


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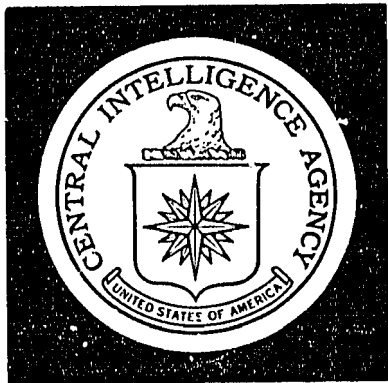
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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

KING HUSAYN'S DILEMMA GROWING SHARPER

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25 May 1970
No. 0508/70



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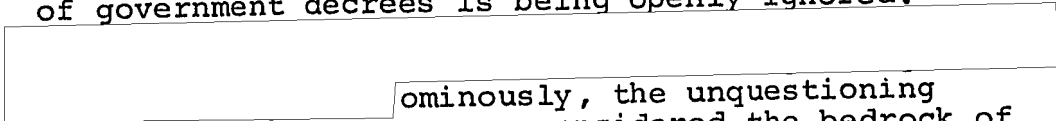
CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
25 May 1970

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

King Husayn's Dilemma Growing Sharper

Summary

For the past several years, King Husayn's authority has come under increasingly severe challenge from the country's proliferating groups of fedayeen. His repeated but hesitant attempts to impose the writ of the central government on the commandos have provoked ever-more serious crises, but have had little effect in restraining the fedayeen; the latest set of government decrees is being openly ignored.



ominously, the unquestioning loyalty of the army--once considered the bedrock of the Hashemite monarchy--can no longer be taken for granted.

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Husayn has in the past manifested remarkable staying power. Presiding over a country that is an artificial creation whose elements have never coalesced, he remains a somewhat tarnished symbol of unity. Although pro-fedayeen sentiment is strong and growing, Husayn can still draw on considerable support from much of the army, from conservatives,

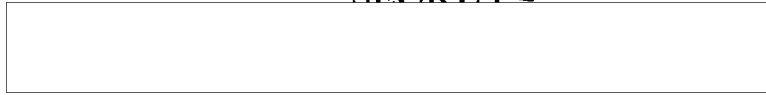
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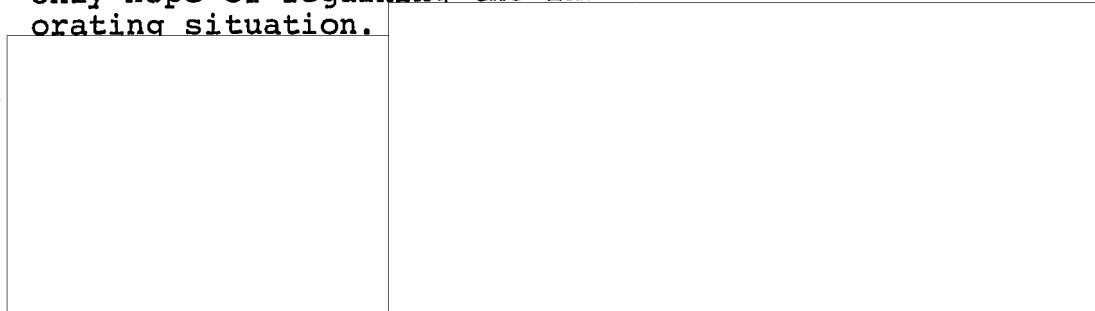
and from traditional--primarily Bedouin--elements. Perhaps the most telling factor in his favor is the division among the fedayeen, who are devoting much of their energies to maneuvering against one another in an effort to control the movement. Leaders of Fatah, the largest group, are even said to have agreed to help the King whip the others into line if they are given the freedom to do so.



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The fedayeen cause is a popular one among Palestinians and non-Palestinians alike; it provides an outlet for Arab feelings of inferiority and frustration growing out of the humiliation of 1967. Nevertheless, pro-fedayeen sentiment has been somewhat tempered by the high-handed activities of the more radical groups and by the commandos' less-than-dazzling record against the Israelis--for example, during the Israeli reprisal raid into Lebanon in May. There probably remains in Jordan a large body of opinion that favors law and order and would support Husayn in a genuine effort to curb the fedayeen; firm action may well be Husayn's only hope of regaining the initiative in a deteriorating situation.



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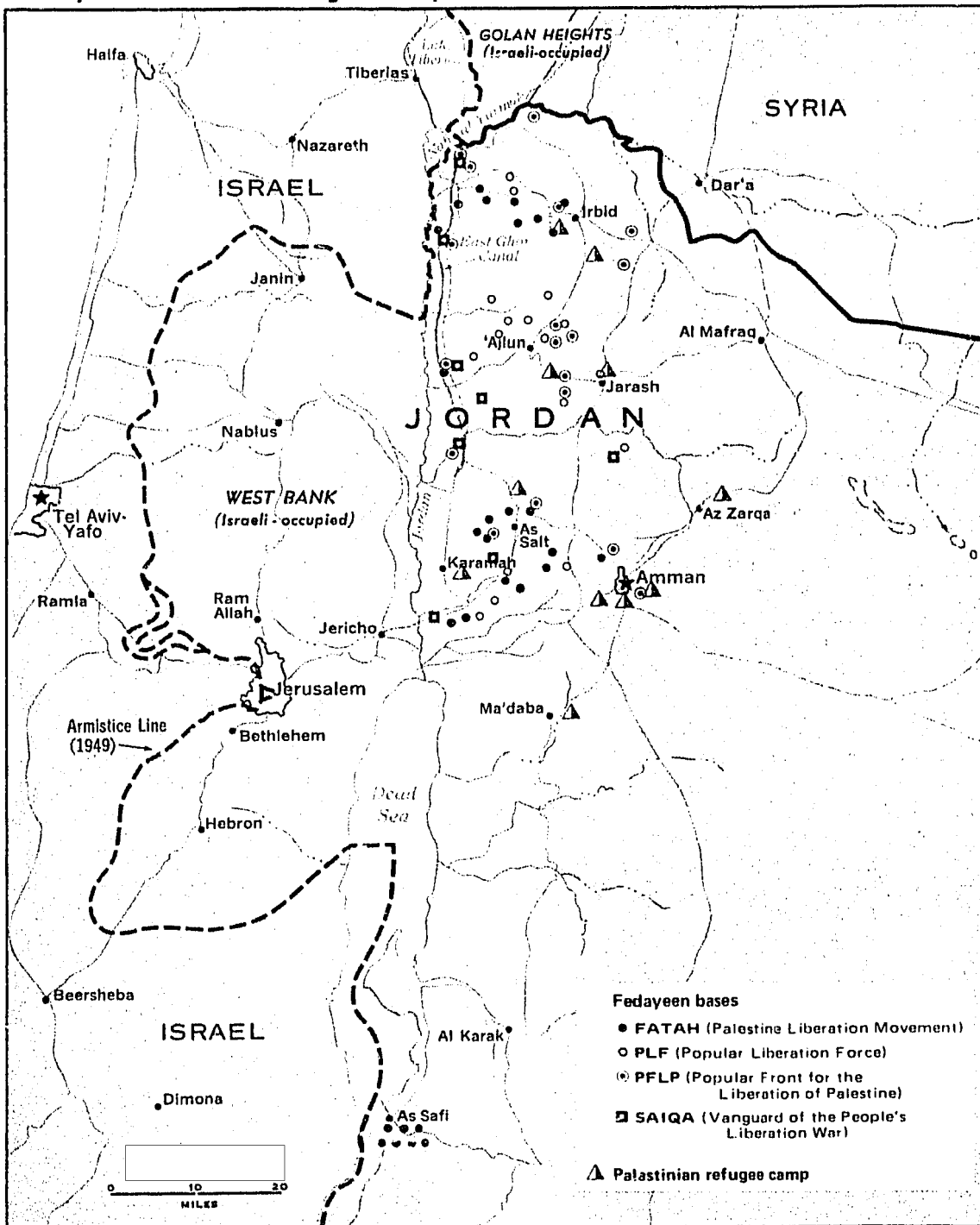
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Fedayeen Bases and Refugee Camps in JORDAN's East Bank



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The Growth of the Fedayeen "State"

1. Fedayeen popularity in Jordan received a major boost in March 1968 when the commandos and the army exacted heavy casualties during an Israeli raid on fedayeen camps near Karamah. By the following November, uniformed and armed fedayeen had the run of downtown Amman, where they set up roadblocks, detained civilians, and extracted taxes from the population. A shooting incident in Amman that month touched off the first serious government-fedayeen confrontation. It was resolved by an agreement ostensibly subordinating the commandos to some degree of government control but implicitly allowing them a measure of autonomy. The pattern was repeated in April 1969, when the King managed to de-fuse the situation after a series of emergency meetings between government and fedayeen leaders.

2. Husayn's first tentative effort to impose meaningful restraints on the fedayeen was the result of Israeli-generated pressures. Amman's reaction to Israeli breaches of the East Ghor Canal during the summer of 1969 gave Israel opportunities to insist that Jordan impose quiet along the ceasefire lines before repairs would be permitted; Husayn apparently did his best to comply. In June, King Husayn gave the defense portfolio to his former director of public security, Rasul Kaylani, a move that the commandos interpreted as aimed directly at them. Kaylani proved to be relatively ineffective, however. During anti-American demonstrations that August, fedayeen military police assumed full responsibility for keeping the crowds under control, while the Jordanian police stood on the sidelines. The fedayeen began again to assess monthly "contributions" from Amman storekeepers and took to killing local citizens they found undesirable, without interference from the civilian police.

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3. Throughout the year, Husayn was also forced to ponder the example of Lebanon, where government attempts to restrict fedayeen activity had brought on a full-scale crisis, toppled the cabinet, invited the intervention of other Arab states, and ended in November by leaving the fedayeen with a freer hand than before.

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His issuance of law-and-order decrees on 10 February was clumsily handled, however; no advance notice was given to fedayeen leaders or to the army--whether through Husayn's own fault or that of his ministers is unclear. The commandos quickly served notice that they would resist the new measures and formed a Unified Command to coordinate action; a series of clashes between fedayeen forces and Jordanian police left 60 dead. The King hastily backed away from a showdown. He agreed to freeze his original decrees--thus enabling the fedayeen to trumpet total victory--pending negotiations between the two sides.

4. On 18 February, the fedayeen issued their own set of law-and-order decrees. They were very similar to those of the King, with one vital exception--enforcement was to remain in fedayeen, not government, hands. The "settlement," announced on 22 February, skillfully fuzed over this issue. Although the key points of the original decrees were preserved or even extended--largely through the inclusion of "concessions" offered by the fedayeen to burnish their public image--failure to deal with the question of enforcement enabled the fedayeen to put their own gloss on the text. The King's earlier measures "were never issued," they claimed; the fedayeen had merely agreed to observe their own code of discipline. Additional meetings were supposed to be held to clarify the problem of implementation, but months passed, leaving the question in limbo. Meanwhile, the fedayeen proceeded to ignore the agreement without provoking a reaction from the King.

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prompt freezing of the law-and-order decrees and the virtually unchecked activity of the commandos after the crisis were inevitably interpreted as a defeat for the King. Succeeding events have seemed to confirm this interpretation. Anti-American demonstrations in Amman against US Assistant Secretary Sisco's projected visit in mid-April were controlled--where they were controlled at all--primarily through the efforts of some of the more moderate fedayeen groups; the Jordanian authorities stood aside, creating the impression of a regime unwilling or unable to maintain order.

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Fedayeen Strength

6. After the creation of Israel in 1948, Jordan absorbed some 500,000 refugees, and inherited the inhabitants of the West Bank--which used to be a portion of Palestine--more than doubling the country's population. More bitterly anti-Israeli than most Arabs, politically subordinated to the less skilled and educated Jordanians of the East Bank, and frequently unemployed, these people gravitated toward the embryonic fedayeen groups. The Palestinians were always a headache for Husayn, but the fedayeen movement itself was negligible until the 1967 war deprived Jordan of the West Bank. New and old refugees poured across the river--including a large number dislodged from the Gaza Strip--bringing the number of Jordan's refugees up to nearly 700,000 out of a total population of 2.2 million. At the same time, the commando movement, almost a laughingstock before the war, began to emerge as the most dynamic element in Middle East politics--the Arabs' only hope, however far-fetched, of regaining their lost lands.

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7. Commandos in Jordan--including those armed in refugee camps--are now thought to number 8-10,000. About half of them belong to Fatah, the largest, best-funded, and most moderate group. Two or three thousand are members of Saiga, founded and directed by Syria's left-wing Baathist regime. The radical Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, led by George Habbash, numbers about 1,000. Smaller organizations count their membership in the hundreds or less; there are somewhere around 30 groups all told.

8. The fedayeen have always been a disorganized lot, inherently undisciplined and given to breaking into splinter groups. An attempt a year ago to coordinate the military activity of five of the major groups led to the formation of a largely paper entity, the Palestine Armed Struggle Command. The King's move last February to clamp down frightened the fedayeen into a temporary tightening of ranks, but the 11-member Unified Command they established never managed any concerted activity other than the issuing of proclamations. Although both Fatah and Saiga reportedly opposed the anti-Sisco demonstrations in April, the more radical groups nevertheless incited damaging riots. It seems unlikely that the recent creation by these same 11 groups of a new central committee within the Palestine Liberation Organization will prove any more meaningful.

9. In the course of Jordan's developing polarization between the regime and the fedayeen, Fatah's role has grown increasingly ambivalent.

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Fatah was presumably motivated in part by fear that in any kind of military confrontation, it would be eradicated along with the other commando organizations. But Yasir Arafat and the present Fatah leadership almost certainly realize that as the King's position deteriorates, their own leading role--such as it is--will come under increasing fire from more radical fedayeen groups. Diminished as Husayn's actual power may be,

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the monarchy is still a stabilizing factor--one of the few left to Jordan. If Husayn goes, the result--whatever it might be--would almost certainly be unpalatable for Fatah. In an army takeover, fedayeen activity might well be drastically curtailed, if not eliminated altogether. Even if the fedayeen ended up running the country, Fatah would at best be one of many groups--all of the others more radical, all doing their best to push Fatah into line. At worst, Fatah could find itself edged out of the country's power structure.

10. Such a view of the future may explain the "pact" said to have been struck between Yasir Arafat of Fatah and the King early in May--virtually an agreement to collaborate in reining in the more radical fedayeen.

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Such an alliance may help prop up Husayn for a time, although it will not solve his long-term problems. Fatah cannot impose its line on the other groups by force, and overt collaboration with the King would be viewed by fedayeen sympathizers as treachery to their cause. There have already been signs that Yasir Arafat's leadership is being challenged by more radical elements within Fatah itself; such pressures will presumably, in time, push Arafat further to the left--or else Fatah will move left without him.

Husayn's Crumbling Support

11. It used to be an article of faith that both Jordan's Army and the country's Bedouin element would stand behind the King, come what may. This is no longer axiomatic. The fedayeen have been working for some time to buy off, penetrate, or otherwise neutralize the Bedouin.

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Even the King has at last become concerned; the appointment in May of Mashur Haditha al-Jazi--a leader of

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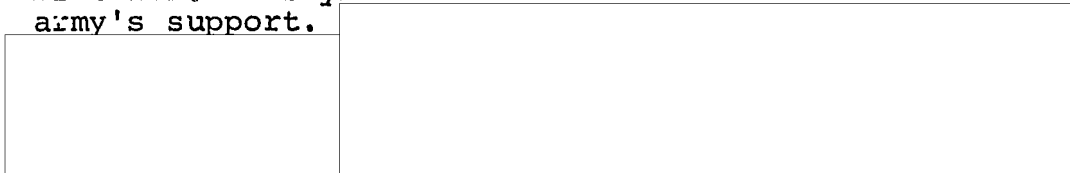
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the influential Huwaytat tribe--as chief of staff of the Jordanian Army was probably an attempt to shore up the King's popularity among the Bedouin.

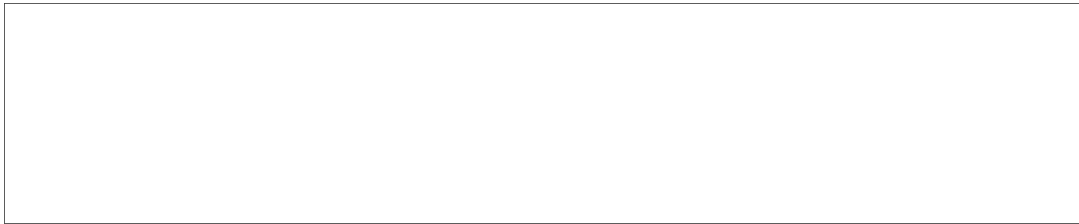
12. Nor is it clear that Husayn can rely on the Jordan Arab Army in a showdown with the fedayeen. Jordanians in general are emotionally attached to the fedayeen crusade to recover their occupied West Bank, and these feelings are presumably shared by Jordanians in the army. A face-off against the fedayeen could well find substantial numbers of the rank and file reluctant to fire on their Palestinian brethren. Husayn claims to have no doubt of the army's support.



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13. A major factor inhibiting Husayn's use of the army in a crisis is his nervousness over the presence of Iraqi troops in Jordan. Before July, according to some reports, these troops are slated to number 50,000, equal to the size of the entire Jordanian Army (Iraq, however, would face serious problems in supplying so many troops.) The Iraqi forces carefully stood aside during the February crisis, but they routinely furnish logistical and operational support to the fedayeen. King Husayn, aware that Baghdad has no particular love for the Hashemite monarchy, clearly fears Iraqi intervention on the side of the fedayeen, yet feels powerless to deny entry to the troops. In consequence, he will avoid committing his army against the commandos except as a last resort.

Outlook



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15. If Husayn has in fact decided against enforcing bounds to fedayeen activity, he will presumably adopt a number of measures in an effort to buy more time. The pact with Fatah seems to have been one step in this direction. Should this prove insufficient, Husayn may well try to form a national coalition government in which the fedayeen--at least Fatah and its supporters--would be represented; but as the fedayeen movement as a whole moves to the left, Fatah, too, must shift, or face a loss of influence. The King may eventually feel forced to deal with mounting criticism of his reliance on aid from the US--now virtually identified with Israel in Arab eyes--by combining strong denunciations of the US with the acceptance of Soviet arms. This may give Husayn's popularity a momentary lift, but at best it is a stop-gap. The fedayeen's political power in Jordan will continue to grow with the passage of time, while Husayn's image as a leader will wear steadily thinner and the regime's isolation from the population will deepen. Nevertheless, if Husayn does not initiate and then fumble a new clamp-down, and if the fedayeen do not flout the King's authority too obviously or provoke intolerable retaliation from the Israelis, Husayn can probably keep afloat in a gradually deteriorating situation for some time.

16. In Jordan's charged atmosphere, however, even a small spark has explosive potential. The factor most likely to bring events to a head would be a step-up in the present low level of fedayeen

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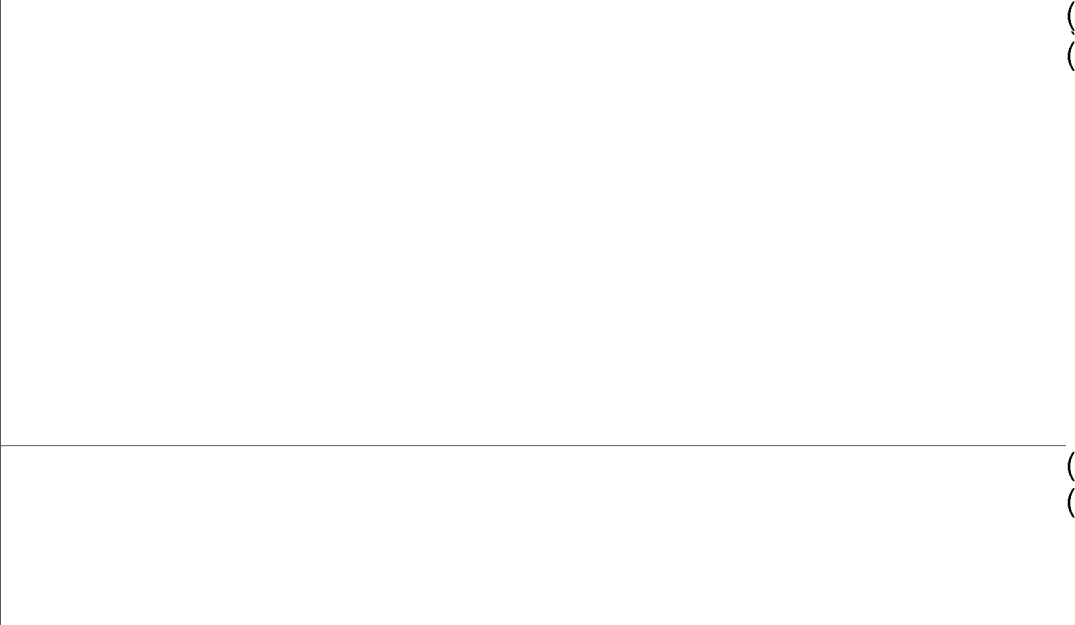
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cross-border incursions or shellings. Early in May, attempts by Fatah to shell Israeli units near an area of the East Ghor Canal that was under repair provoked the intervention of the Jordanian Army, which cleaned out three fedayeen camps, destroying their arms and provisions. This clash followed on the heels of an announcement by one of the commando groups that it had uncovered a plot by Sharif Nasir, the head of the Jordanian Army, to assassinate several fedayeen leaders. The two incidents confirmed growing suspicions among the fedayeen and their supporters that the regime has been collaborating with the Israelis to keep the cease-fire lines quiet and to exterminate the commandos.

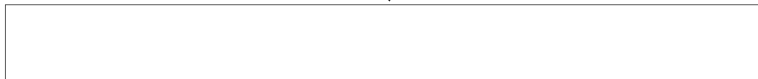
17. Husayn, in consequence, cannot afford much more in the way of overt activity against the fedayeen. If groups other than Fatah suspect that the King will not act against them and attempt to exploit his reluctance by increased anti-Israeli operations, Husayn's dilemma will be painfully sharpened.



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The fedayeen appreciate their freedom from the responsibilities of day-to-day statecraft and depend more than they



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19. The prospect of a fedayeen state [redacted]

[redacted] could compel army commanders, said to be champing at the bit to deal with the fedayeen, to take matters into their own hands and try to run the country themselves. Such a move could well meet with a large degree of support throughout the country at large. Even some of the Palestinians--primarily the more successful ones who have been absorbed into Jordanian society and risk the loss of their business interests--as well as some Bedouin chieftains, are said to be growing increasingly disenchanted with the fedayeen, particularly the antics of the more radical groups. An army regime determined to bridle the fedayeen could probably count on the support of the conservative elements within the country that are being progressively alienated [redacted]

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[redacted] Such an army-dominated Arab republic would probably be more moderate than most military regimes. Jordanian Army leaders are better trained--for the most part, Western-trained--than are those of most Arab armies; some of the traditions of the old Arab Legion still linger. Nevertheless, a moderate army regime would be vulnerable; pressure from more radical elements among the rank and file could push it toward the left, or a group of radical younger officers could seize power directly--possibly with a subversive push from Syria or Iraq.

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20. Perhaps the only alternative holding out a real prospect of extricating Husayn from his narrowing position is the use of the army against the fedayeen in the early future. [redacted]

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APPENDIXKing Husayn's Dilemma Growing SharperChronology

March 1968	Israeli raid on fedayeen camps at Karamah
November 1968	First government-fedayeen confrontation, resolved by agreement.
April 1969	Government-fedayeen crisis, resolved by emergency meetings between the two sides
June 1969	Husayn appoints Rasul Kaylani as Minister of Defense
August 1969	Anti-American demonstrations in Amman controlled by fedayeen police
10 February 1970	King issues law-and-order decrees
12 February 1970	King agrees to "freeze" decrees
18 February 1970	Fedayeen issue their own set of decrees
21 February 1970	Talks begin between government and fedayeen leaders
22 February 1970	Government-fedayeen "agreement" announced
15 April 1970	Riots in Amman protesting Assistant Secretary Sisco's planned visit to Jordan

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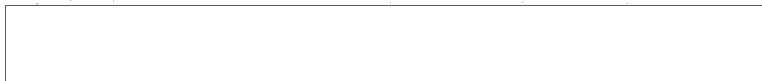
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19 April 1970	Cabinet reshuffle
30 April 1970	Announcement of plot by Sharif Nasir to assassinate fedayeen leaders
May 1970	Reported pact between regime and Fatah
2 May 1970	Jordanian Army cleans out three fedayeen camps



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