

# NEAR EAST REPORT

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## A Disappointing Report On The PLO

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee reacted with disappointment to the new State Department report on the PLO's compliance with its commitments regarding the peace process. The congressionally mandated report was issued June 1.

"AIPAC is strongly supportive of the peace process, and commends the unwavering efforts of the Clinton Administration and Congress to move the process forward," said AIPAC President Steve Grossman. "Holding the PLO to an appropriate standard of compliance is one of the most important steps the U.S. can take to encourage Israeli-Palestinian peace. It is therefore disappointing that the new State Department report fails to insist on such a standard."

Although it cites the need for the PLO to improve its performance, the report fails to call on Yasir Arafat and the PLO to unequivocally oppose all Palestinian terrorism.

"Unfortunately, the report all too often excuses the PLO's failures to respond to terrorism, to assume responsibility over all PLO elements and personnel, and to discipline violators," stated AIPAC Executive Director Neal Sher. "Arafat committed himself to respond to all attacks, no matter who perpetrated them, and regardless of whether or not he had advance knowledge."

The PLO has not condemned terrorist groups such as Hamas which have attacked Israelis; nor has it taken any known steps to discipline violators it presumably could control, such as the Fatah Hawks. Arafat has condemned only four of the approximately 90 attacks on Israelis which have occurred since September 13. All of these condemnations came after severe pressure from the U.S. and Israel.

In recent weeks, Arafat has repeatedly disparaged binding agreements with Israel as being only "temporary." This does little to inspire confidence in the PLO's willingness to abide by them.

In the May 4 Gaza-Jericho accords, the PLO agreed that it shall "take all measures necessary" to prevent acts of terrorism and crime, and to prevent hostile acts against settlements. The PLO also agreed to "prevent terrorist infiltration into Israel," as well as arms smuggling.

AIPAC will continue its work with Congress to ensure that the PLO fulfills all of its responsibilities.

Any legislation affecting assistance to the PLO must include the unequivocal requirement that the PLO meet all of its commitments. For the peace process to succeed, the Clinton Administration must rigorously insist that the PLO meet its obligations.

## Syria, Iran, Hezbollah Foment Lebanon Turmoil

As we went to press, Israeli tanks and artillery were massed on the Lebanon border to deter further Katyusha rocket attacks by the Iranian and Syrian-backed terrorist group Hezbollah. On June 2, Hezbollah fired an estimated 60 Katyushas into northern Israel.

Most of the rockets landed in unpopulated areas near the coastal city of Nahariya, causing property damage but no casualties. The IDF ordered civilians living in the northern part of the country to sleep in bomb shelters.

"You never get used to it," said Yossi Suleimani, a grocer in Kiryat Shemona. "It's scary. You have children, and you worry." (*New York Times*, June 4).

The Katyusha attacks followed a major Israeli air raid against a Hezbollah training base which had occurred hours earlier. Israel Air Force planes bombed a Hezbollah camp near Baalbek, Lebanon, killing upwards of 30 terrorist trainees, and wounding at least 60.

That Hezbollah camp is located in the Bekaa Valley—one of the world's foremost international terrorist training centers. (According to the State Department's new annual report on terrorism, the Bekaa, which is controlled by the Syrian Army, is also believed to be a base for groups such as the Abu Nidal

Organization; the Kurdish Worker's Party—the PKK—which operates against Turkey, as well as the Japanese Red Army; and Ahmed Jibril's PFLP-GC).

The Hezbollah rocket attacks clearly violate an understanding worked out last summer, after the IDF launched a full-scale offensive in order to force Damascus and the Syrian-dominated Lebanese Government to curb Hezbollah.

The agreement, brokered by Secretary of State WARREN CHRISTOPHER, bars Hezbollah

from attacking northern Israel, but is silent on the question of attacks on Israeli forces in southern Lebanon as well as those against the South Lebanon Army (SLA), an Arab militia aligned with Israel. Hezbollah has stepped up the latter form of attack in recent months, part of its longstanding effort to destroy the Arab-Israeli peace process.

IDF Chief of Staff Gen. Ehud Barak said that the presence of Syrian troops near Hezbollah bases would not deter Israel from responding to continued attacks. "I am sure that this is not the last time we will have to act, and send the army's long arm to strike at Hezbollah—even in areas under Syrian control," Barak said June 3. "Hezbollah is not

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AP/Nati Harnik  
Israeli children in Kiryat Shemona spent the night of June 2 in bomb shelters. Thousands of residents in northern Israel were ordered to stay in specially reinforced "secured rooms" after Hezbollah fired Katyusha rockets into the western Galilee region.

## Palestinian Authority Faces Harsh Economic Realities

Israeli officials continue to express a great deal of concern over the ability of the new Palestinian Authority (PA) in Gaza and Jericho to handle economic and civilian affairs.

The PA was supposed to begin paying the salaries of government employees in the autonomous regions effective June 1; the chaotic financial situation, however, has made it impossible for the Palestinians to discharge their responsibilities in this area.

The problem is particularly acute in Gaza, where thousands of workers and their families will lose their only source of income.

"The Gazans are in despair," reported an Israeli analyst who visited there at the end of May. "The people in the street are demand-

ing that their situation be improved."

"The Palestinian Authority has no idea what building an infrastructure entails," said one of the PA's closest Israeli interlocutors. "Not in electricity, water, sewage, roads..."

A number of recent visitors to Gaza report that many residents are angry over Yasir Arafat's failure to make progress toward alleviating their financial plight.

"They are burning his pictures in Gaza. Touring Gaza [June 2], I didn't see a single picture of him, except in the police stations," said one.

"Arafat is losing his grip," warned a former Civil Administration official. "If Arafat does

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## Turmoil...*continued*

immune to attack anywhere."

Barak attributed the devastating accuracy of the IDF strike to "good timing" and "new intelligence information."

Within Israel, there is considerable speculation that vital data has been provided by Mustafa Dirani, a radical Muslim militia leader in Lebanon, who was captured by Israeli commandos May 21.

Dirani, a close ally of Hezbollah, is also believed to have information on the whereabouts of missing Israeli airman Ron Arad, who was shot down over Lebanon in 1986. Dirani reportedly held Arad captive until 1988, when he turned the Israeli prisoner over to Hezbollah for money.

Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's Secretary-General, told 15,000 demonstrators at a June 3 rally near Beirut that Hezbollah would use suicide bombers to attack Israel. "Zionists wait, wait. Hezbollah are coming," the mob chanted. (In Hebron, 100 Islamic radicals rioted in protest, throwing rocks at Israeli troops).

In a June 3 CBS interview, Yasir Arafat sharply criticized the Israeli raid against Hezbollah, suggesting that it would undermine the peace process. Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa implied that the strike constituted an "infringement" upon Lebanese sovereignty.

After a June 4 meeting in Damascus with Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati, Syrian President Hafez Assad accused Israel of "escalat[ing]...tension in the area." Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk Al-Sharaa denounced Israeli "aggression" and said Israel was "practicing the law of the jungle" (Reuters, June 4). During his visit, Velayati met with Hezbollah leaders at the Iranian Embassy in Damascus to discuss the Lebanon situation.

Both Syria and Iran reportedly urged Hezbollah to exercise "restraint," and to stop firing missiles into Israel. For now, Hezbollah appears to be confining its attacks to Israel's small security zone in Lebanon.

Meanwhile, the Syrian-dominated Lebanese Government appears to be interested in closer ties with Hezbollah. Prime Minister Rafik Hariri reportedly called Nasrallah to stress Beirut's support for Hezbollah "resistance" efforts against Israel.

Hariri dispatched one of his top aides to offer condolences to Hezbollah's spiritual mentor, Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, and the rest of the Hezbollah leadership.

Lebanese President Elias Hrawi telephoned Fadlallah to assure him that the Israeli raid "targeted the Lebanese people as a whole" (*Mideast Mirror*, June 6). J.H. □

## Palestinian...*continued*

go to elections, he could be in for a big surprise," said a senior official. With his popularity waning, the PLO Chairman may take up residence in the nearby Egyptian town of El-Arish after he arrives in the area.

On the military side, however, Israeli authorities continue to express cautious optimism. "The IDF-Palestinian police cooperation is good," said a senior Israeli military official. "The [Palestinian] officers are taking their job seriously, and are willing to listen to Israeli advice."

The publicized failures of the police—including the mistaken arrests of Israelis—are usually caused by the fact that individual policemen do not know the details of the Israeli-PLO accord.

"We will be translating the agreement into Arabic for them," said one legal expert. "In one recent set of talks with a local commander, we discovered that he was working off of an old draft of the agreement."

Economic problems in Gaza and Jericho, however, could soon impact on the performance of the police. "They were supposed to have 9,000 police," a Foreign Ministry source says. "Instead, they have 4,000." Another visitor to Gaza reported that the police are seeking handouts of food. "They come with the shirts on their backs, with no blankets, no beds, nothing."

### The Hamas Threat

There is concern that Hamas (which functions as both a social welfare agency and a terrorist group) could ultimately fill the void by providing food and shelter to the Palestinian police in an effort to secure their allegiance. For now, however, there are signs of discord between the PLO and Hamas.

Palestinian police commander Nasser Youssef vowed to capture the gunmen responsible for the May 27 murders of two Palestinians deemed "suspected collaborators" with Israel. Hamas has claimed responsibility for the crime. Youssef added that the police favor "political pluralism," and invited Palestinian gunmen to join "the national security forces" (i.e., police). He said that only a few had answered the call (Reuters, June 3).

Hamas responded angrily to Youssef's remarks. It issued a statement warning Youssef that he would be "held responsible" if the police interfered with Hamas' efforts to enforce its own brand of "justice." It added that police should be "running after collaborators and killing them" instead of targeting Hamas.

Also, Palestinians staged several days of rioting in Ramallah in early June. They were protesting the deaths of two Hamas fugitives, who died in a May 31 clash with Israeli troops

in the nearby town of Al-Ram.

One of those killed was Abdelmoneim Abu-Hmaid, who was wanted for his role in the February 13 murder of Israeli intelligence agent Noam Cohen. After the killing, Hamas sent a videotape to an international news agency in which Abu-Hmaid—brandishing an M16 rifle—bragged about his role in the crime.

### Arafat, PLO Statements Undermine Confidence

While Israelis and Palestinians attempt to implement autonomy on the ground, Yasir Arafat and others in the PLO continue to behave in a way that undercuts these efforts. In a June 3 "*CBS Evening News*" interview, Arafat threatened to cancel an upcoming visit to Jericho unless international donors sent money at once.

He asserted that "the Israeli occupation" had "destroyed all the infrastructure" in the territories.

In response, Israeli Government spokesman Uri Dromi noted that Israel had dramatically improved the situation, compared to what it had been prior to the Six-Day War.

"It's about time that Arafat stopped playing the beggar and the whiner, and got down to work on the problems there," Dromi stated.

Abu Alaa, appointed "minister" of trade in the autonomous areas, told Palestinian businessmen visiting Tunis that "it is not at all beneficial" to set up joint economic ventures with Israelis (Reuters, June 3).

At a June 1 meeting with Arafat, Sen. RUSSELL FEINGOLD (D-WI), asked the PLO leader to help end the Arab boycott of Israel.

"We did not get a clear response," Feingold said.

Arafat met with Feingold and Sens. HARRY REID (D-NV), and PAUL SIMON (D-IL). Arafat spoke to the senators while seated under a map of the Middle East which also "did not indicate the existence of the State of Israel," Feingold said. (See related story in "*Heard On The Hill*," p. 107).

Jibril Rajoub, head of Palestinian security services in Jericho, said in a recent speech that "the Israelis must leave our capital—East Jerusalem. Jerusalem is a red line for us" (*Jerusalem Post*, June 4). In another inflammatory speech, delivered in Bethlehem, Rajoub declared that Palestinian "collaborators" deserve no mercy, and that settlers "who violate Palestinian laws will be treated harshly" (*Mideast Mirror*, Jun 1).

In fact, the Gaza-Jericho agreement makes clear that the Government of Israel—not the Palestinian Authority—has sole legal jurisdiction over settlers. J.H. □

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HEARD ON THE HILL

# State Department Report Cautious In Criticism Of PLO

In a broad review of the PLO's response to terrorism over the past five months, a new State Department report notes failures by the PLO leadership to condemn acts of violence, but also argues that Yasir Arafat's influence over Palestinian terrorism is limited.

The State Department's report to Congress details PLO activity since last January. As mandated by law, the Administration must report on the PLO's compliance with the commitments it made last September to renounce terrorism and seek peaceful political change. If President Clinton certifies that the PLO has complied, he is authorized to waive certain anti-PLO laws for six months. The waiver enables the PLO to maintain an office in the U.S., and allows Washington to support assistance to the PLO through multilateral institutions.

The State Department report includes descriptions of more than 40 specific acts of terrorism directed against Israeli soldiers and civilians during the past five months. The majority of them were committed by non-PLO groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad, although the Fatah Hawks and PLO dissident groups were clearly implicated in some cases. An earlier report listed 45 additional acts of violence against Israelis since the Israel-PLO peace accord was signed last September.

## Few Reactions To Terrorist Incidents

Noting that the PLO has condemned only four of the almost 90 terrorist attacks detailed in the two State Department documents, the report does criticize PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat for failing "to do more to condemn [terrorist] violence in a timely, authoritative, and unambiguous fashion." However, it also seeks to limit Arafat's responsibility, arguing that he should not be held responsible for a failure to respond to terrorism perpetrated by Palestinian groups outside of his control or for actions taken without his "foreknowledge."

The report details PLO responses to terrorist acts. These accounts underscore the weak actions taken by the PLO leadership. In its limited denunciations, the PLO would often simply express "regret" for the numerous Israeli deaths, using language that was extremely mild; in no instance has any PLO official stated unequivocally that Israelis should not be attacked. Instead, leaders have merely emphasized that these violent incidents threaten the peace process.

The report does not critically evaluate the PLO's failure to discipline violators. In fact, the PLO has not taken any known steps to discipline violators it presumably could control, such as the Fatah Hawks. Nevertheless, the report attempts to lessen Arafat's accountability for these actions by noting that "he does not exercise operational control over

the Fatah Hawks."

In addition, the State Department analysis appears to suggest that the IDF bears indirect responsibility for some of the violence perpetrated by the Fatah Hawks. The report states: "Tensions have been exacerbated by several incidents between the Fatah Hawks and the IDF, particularly in Gaza."

The report also recounts Arafat's call for a "jihad" to recapture Jerusalem, and his description of the Israel-PLO pact as a "temporary" agreement. The comments, part of a speech delivered by Arafat in a Johannesburg mosque, caused a public outcry. This speech does draw tempered words of criticism: "Too often, PLO officials, and Arafat in particular, issue statements that appear to be in variance with the PLO's own actions and behaviors. This was especially true of Arafat's Johannesburg statements that damaged Arafat's credibility." The report continues: "The PLO cannot afford to be associated with any statement that raises such questions or undercuts the credibility of its commitments."

The State Department displays in the report a reluctance to confirm important facts necessary to measure Arafat's compliance. In discussing a speech calling for the continuation of the intifada, the report describes the radio broadcast as "a speech attributed to Arafat that was broadcast by Voice of Palestine radio." The description indicates no attempt by the State Department to establish the authenticity of the attribution.

The report also addresses the PLO's progress in carrying out Arafat's commitment to amend the Palestinian charter. The report notes that the charter has not been amended, but that Arafat has pledged to Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin that he will submit the required changes at the next meeting of the Palestinian National Council.

Regarding the continuing Arab boycott of Israel, the report acknowledges that "the PLO has not publicly denounced the Arab League boycott of Israel." However, it also asserts that the recently signed Israeli-Palestinian economic agreement "has the practical effect of ending the boycott by the PLO, because it provides the framework for open commerce between Israel and the occupied territories."

The report also states that no progress has been made over the past five months regarding PLO compensation to American victims of terrorism. The report adds: "On the subject of PLO compensation to American victims of terrorism, we have raised this issue with the PLO, and will continue to pursue the subject."

## Senators Meet With Arafat

In another signal of changing U.S.-PLO relations following the Gaza-Jericho agree-

ment, three U.S. lawmakers met June 2 with PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat in Tunis. Arafat warned visiting Sens. PAUL SIMON (D-IL), RUSS FEINGOLD (D-WI), and HARRY REID (D-NV) that the newly autonomous Gaza Strip and Jericho region could become the world's next Somalia if the U.S. and other donor nations do not immediately make good on their pledges of financial assistance. With prompt assistance from the U.S. and other donor nations, Arafat claimed, they could become the next Singapore.

Feingold pressed Arafat to lift the Arab boycott of Israel as a critical confidence-building measure. Afterwards Feingold stated: "The events of September 13 set the Middle East on a new course....Arafat must be able to show results for the risks he has taken, and he must offer results to the Israelis so that they too will see the rewards of peace." □

## Jordan, Israel Move Closer To Expanding Commercial, Political Contacts

Jordan and Israel have moved closer to expanding ties by agreeing to open negotiations on boundaries and other issues, including cooperation on civil aviation matters.

The two countries also agreed in principle to build a highway linking Israel, Jordan and Egypt, and to cooperate on construction of a cultural park that would straddle their common border.

Further discussions are expected to take place next month in Israel or Jordan.

"We are glad that yet another step on the road to peace has been taken," said Israeli negotiator Elyakim Rubinstein.

Asked whether the steps toward expanded contacts would mean an end to the Arab economic boycott of Israel, Jordanian Ambassador Fayez Tarawneh replied: "We still have a long way to go. This is not a Jordanian decision. This is an Arab decision."

Among the steps agreed to were:

- beginning work on a joint framework for future trade and economic relations.
- inviting Palestinians to participate in joint discussions on trade, banking, and financial issues.
- opening discussions on tourist promotion and creation of a transboundary cultural heritage park in the Rift Valley.
- convening a meeting of technical experts in July to discuss cooperation on civil aviation (AP, June 7).

## Israel Moves Ahead With Arms Control Agenda

**A**lthough overshadowed by the events surrounding Gaza/Jericho and negotiations with Syria, Israel has within the past month made some significant proposals regarding the broader issue of arms control in the Middle East. It may be some time before these efforts bear fruit, given the many obstacles and risks involved. Nevertheless, Israel has emerged as the region's leading arms control proponent.

The fifth round of the multilateral Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) Working Group was held in Doha, Qatar May 2-5. Israel was one of 13 Middle Eastern countries attending the talks, along with a number of other states, while the U.S. and Russia, served as cosponsors. Israel's delegation was led by David Ivri, Director-General of the Defense Ministry. He said prior to the talks that "our goal is to reduce forces and weapons, all weapons. We want to lower the risk of war, to lower the friction."

The purpose of the meeting was to agree on a "Declaration of Principles and Statements of Intent," (DoP) outlining the broad goals of the ACRS process. These included the following objectives: preventing conflict through misunderstanding by adopting security-building measures; limiting military spending; reducing conventional arms stockpiles and preventing an arms race; and establishing a "weapons of mass destruction freeze."

The session ended, however, without adoption of the sought-after DoP because of objections from some Arab states that the proposed draft was too political, and that it implied a commitment to ending the state of war with Israel. The head of the Saudi delegation declared that "we are not empowered to discuss issues like normalization and bilateral relations."

There was positive discussion of some specific confidence-building measures (CBMs) to lessen tension and build trust in the region. These included: maritime cooperation in search and rescue operations in international waters; mutual notification of increases in forces, weapons, and military exercises, with periodic inspections; and a Dutch proposal for a computer-based communications network to link Middle East foreign ministries.

This final CBM was agreed to by most of the delegations, and the network should be operational by next year. Summing up the Qatar talks, U.S. delegation leader Robert Einhorn indicated "There was a much better understanding...greater comfort in talking to each other."

In spite of the discussion of CBMs, actual

agreement on curbing new weapons imports or reducing the level of existing arsenals is not expected soon. Such arms control efforts are likely to occur only after a political settlement in the region. First, there is a fundamental disagreement on what is the most important threat to security in the region.

The Arab parties, including Egypt, have sought to focus attention on Israel's assumed nuclear deterrent, while Israel remains fundamentally concerned with the growing conventional military imbalance which the IDF faces. Second, no arms control agreement is possible without the participation of the most heavily armed and radical states in the region. Syria, for example, is boycotting the entire multilateral track of the peace process. Iran, Iraq, Libya and Algeria have also failed to attend the ACRS meetings.

In spite of the slow pace of the multilaterals, Israel has recently advanced some far-reaching proposals for regional arms control. Foreign Minister Shimon Peres has suggested the creation of a "Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Middle East," modeled after the European CSCE (*Jerusalem Post*, May 27). The concept, which has been endorsed by Washington, would reportedly include all regional states and deal with arms control, force reduction, economic cooperation and human rights.

Israel also endorsed the creation of a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty (CTBT), indicating that all Middle Eastern states should join. Israel's Ambassador to the UN Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, Yitzhak Lior, stated June 2 that his nation "supports a global and universally applicable CTBT, [and expects it neighbors to join] as an important step towards regional stability and security."

—Charles Perkins

*Perkins is AIPAC's Senior Military Analyst.*

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