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MILITARY INTELLIGENCE DIRECTOR YADLIN COMMENTS ON GAZA, SYRIA AND LEBANON

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1. (S) Summary. During a June 12 meeting with the Ambassador, IDI Director MG Amos Yadlin said that Gaza was "number four" on his list of threats, preceded by Iran, Syria, and Hizballah in that order. Yadlin said the IDI has been predicting armed confrontation in Gaza between Hamas and Fatah since Hamas won the January 2006 legislative council elections. Yadlin felt that the Hamas military wing had initiated the current escalation with the tacit consent of external Hamas leader Khalid Mishal, adding that he did not believe there had been a premeditated political-level decision by Hamas to wipe out Fatah in Gaza. Yadlin dismissed Fatah's capabilities in Gaza, saying Hamas could have taken over there any time it wanted for the past year, but he agreed that Fatah remained strong in the West Bank. Although not necessarily reflecting a GOI consensus view, Yadlin said Israel would be "happy" if Hamas took over Gaza because the IDF could then deal with Gaza as a hostile state. He dismissed the significance of an Iranian role in a Hamas-controlled Gaza "as long as they don't have a port." Regarding predictions of war with Syria this summer, Yadlin

recalled the lead-up to the 1967 war, which he said was provoked by the Soviet Ambassador in Israel. Both Israel and Syria are in a state of high alert, so war could happen easily even though neither side is seeking it. Yadlin suggested that the Asad regime would probably not survive a war, but added that Israel was no longer concerned with maintaining that "evil" regime. On Lebanon, Yadlin felt that the fighting in the Nahr Al-Barid camp was a positive development for Israel since it had "embarrassed" Hizballah, adding that IDI had information that the Fatah Al-Islam terrorist group was planning to attack UNIFIL before it blundered into its confrontation with the LAF. End Summary.

Gaza Fighting Not Israel's Main Problem

2. (S) The Ambassador, accompanied by Pol Couns and DATT, called on IDI Director Major General Amos Yadlin June 12. Noting reports of fierce fighting between Hamas and Fatah in Gaza that day, the Ambassador asked for Yadlin's assessment. Yadlin described Gaza as "not Israel's main problem," noting that it ranked fourth in his hierarchy of threats, behind Iran, Syria, and Hizballah. Yadlin described Gaza as "hopeless for now," commenting that the Palestinians had to realize that Hamas offered no solution. IDI analysts, he said, had predicted a confrontation in Gaza since Hamas won the Palestinian Legislative Council elections in January 2006. Yadlin commented that Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh had become personally close despite their ideological differences, but neither leader had control over those forces under them.

3. (S) Yadlin explained that both Fatah and Hamas contained many factions. The Hamas military wing had been frustrated since the signing of the Mecca Agreement in January, but there were also many armed groups in Gaza that were not under the control of either party. Yadlin cited the example of the Dughmush clan, which had shifted from Fatah to the Popular Resistance Committees to Hamas before becoming an armed entity opposed to all of them. After May 15, the Hamas military wing had sought to export the fighting to Sderot by launching waves of Qassam rockets. One week later, as a result of IDF retaliation, they realized the price was too high and reduced the Qassam attacks.

4. (S) In response to the Ambassador's question, Yadlin said he did not think that day's Hamas attacks on Fatah security forces were part of a premeditated effort to wipe out Fatah

in Gaza. Instead, they probably represented an initiative of the military wing with the tacit consent of Khalid Mishal in Damascus. Mishal was still considering the costs and benefits of the fighting, but the situation had become so tense that any incident could lead to street fighting without any political decision.

Gaza and West Bank Separating

5. (S) The Ambassador asked Yadlin for his assessment of reports that Fatah forces had been ordered not to fight back. Yadlin said Mohammed Dahlan had 500 men and the Presidential Guard had 1,500 more. They understand that the balance of power favors Hamas, which "can take over Gaza any time it wants to." Yadlin said he would be surprised if Fatah fights, and even more surprised if they win. As far as he was concerned, this had been the case for the past year. The situation was different in the West Bank, however, where Fatah remained relatively strong and had even started to

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kidnap Hamas activists. Yadlin agreed that Tawfiq Tirawi had a power base in the West Bank, but he added that Fatah was not cohesive.

6. (S) The Ambassador commented that if Fatah decided it has lost Gaza, there would be calls for Abbas to set up a separate regime in the West Bank. While not necessarily reflecting a consensus GOI view, Yadlin commented that such a development would please Israel since it would enable the IDF to treat Gaza as a hostile country rather than having to deal with Hamas as a non-state actor. He added that Israel could work with a Fatah regime in the West Bank. The Ambassador asked Yadlin if he worried about a Hamas-controlled Gaza giving Iran a new opening. Yadlin replied that Iran was already present in Gaza, but Israel could handle the situation "as long as Gaza does not have a port (sea or air)."

War with Syria "Could Happen Easily"

7. (S) Noting Israeli press speculation, the Ambassador asked Yadlin if he expected war with Syria this summer. Recalling the 1967 war, Yadlin commented that it had started as a result of the Soviet Ambassador in Israel reporting on

non-existing Israeli preparations to attack Syria. Something similar was happening again, he said, with the Russians telling the Syrians that Israel planned to attack them, possibly in concert with a U.S. attack on Iran. Yadlin stated that since last summer's war in Lebanon, Syria had engaged in a "frenzy of preparations" for a confrontation with Israel. The Syrian regime was also showing greater self-confidence. Some Syrian leaders appeared to believe that Syria could take on Israel military, but others were more cautious. The fact that both sides were on high alert meant that a war could happen easily, even though neither side is seeking one. In response to a question, Yadlin said he did not think the Asad regime would survive a war, but he added that preserving that "evil" regime should not be a matter of concern.

Fighting in Nahr al-Barid Positive for Israel

8. (S) The Ambassador asked Yadlin for his views on the fighting in the Nahr al-Barid refugee camp in northern Lebanon. Although Yadlin was called to another meeting and did not have time to elaborate, he answered that the fighting was positive for Israel because it had embarrassed Hizballah, which had been unable to adopt a clear-cut position on the Lebanese Army's action, and because the Fatah al-Islam terrorist organization had been planning to attack UNIFIL and then Israel before it blundered into its current confrontation with the LAF. He also agreed that the confrontation was strengthening the LAF, in fact and in the eyes of the Lebanese people, which was also good.

9. (S) Comment: Yadlin's relatively relaxed attitude toward the deteriorating security situation in Gaza represents a shift in IDF thinking from last fall, when the Southern Command supported a major ground operation into Gaza to remove the growing threat from Hamas. While many media commentators continue to make that argument, Yadlin's view appears to be more in synch with that of Chief of General Staff Ashkenazi, who also believes that the more serious threat to Israel currently comes from the north.

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