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Wikileaks: Insights on Palestine from the Cables

Written for the New Left Project Blog.

*A guest post by Asa Winstanley**

One of the first things that struck me while reading [the cables from the US embassy to Israel in Tel Aviv](#) was how worried the Israeli government seems to be about [the Goldstone Report](#) into war crimes committed during Israel's 2008-2009 attack on the people of Gaza. In [cable 09TELAVIV2777](#) of December 2009, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is said to have named the report as one of three “principal threats” facing Israel—the other two being Iran's alleged nuclear programme and “missile proliferation”.

Second, there are important insights into the high level of collaboration between Israel and forces that have been called the “[Palestinian Contras](#)” in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip. Indeed, the [first “cablegate” headline](#) on Palestine was sourced from [cable 09TELAVIV1177](#), in which Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak is reported to have said he “had consulted with Egypt and Fatah prior to Operation Cast Lead, asking if they were willing to assume control of Gaza once Israel defeated Hamas”. In other words, Fateh leader Mahmoud Abbas (whose term as PA president expired in January 2009) knew the massive Israeli onslaught was coming but said nothing. This was widely suspected, but to read confirmation of it from a confidential US government source is something new.

There's more. [Cable 07TELAVIV1732](#), which I like to call “War of the Puppets”, was released this week. To my mind, it's the most interesting of the Palestine cables released so far. Written in June 2007 during Gaza street-fighting caused by the [ultimately unsuccessful Fateh coup attempt](#), it details a meeting between then-ambassador Richard H. Jones and Yuval Diskin (head of Israel's secret police, the Shabak—aka Shin Bet). It is a portrait of how divided Israel's Palestinian collaborators really were. “[Gaza warlord Mohammed] Dahlan is trying to manage Fatah's security forces by remote control. We are not even sure where he is...” Diskin is quoted as saying. He continued: “[Dahlan's men in Gaza] ask us to attack Hamas. This is a new development. We have never seen this before. They are desperate.” Again, this is all important corroborating evidence for things we already knew or suspected. Recent [media reports](#) of a power struggle between Abbas and Dahlan (whom Fateh elements close to the US now blame for “losing” Gaza) suggest little has changed in terms of Fateh infighting.

Diskin is also reported in [07TELAVIV1732](#) to have claimed the Shabak had “a very good working relationship with the [Palestinian Authority] Preventive Security Organization (PSO) and the General Intelligence Organization (GIO).” The most striking quote in the whole cable to me is this: “Diskin said that the PSO shares with ISA [Shabak] almost all the intelligence that it collects”.

There is also something of an overlooked smoking gun in this cable. Of Tawfik Tirawi, leader of the PA's GIO: “Diskin said... he is trying to develop ties with the Dughmush family in the Gaza Strip.” The Dughmush clan (aka the “Army of Islam”), you may recall, are the same group that in [March 2007 kidnapped BBC journalist Alan Johnston \(he was rescued by Hamas in July\)](#). While a Fateh connection to the group has [long been suspected](#), to my knowledge this is the first confirmation of it from official sources.

Overall, this is a Palestinian Authority acting as nothing more than an extension of the Israeli occupation forces – a relationship that has only deepened in the last three-and-a-half years. However, there is a lot missing in the cables: little on the 2008-2009 Israeli assault on Gaza, nothing on the assassination of Mahmoud al-Mabhouh in Dubai and little on the July 2006 Israeli war

on Lebanon. Despite some rather unlikely conspiracy theories currently doing the rounds on the internet, the likely reasons for these gaps are more mundane. First, none of the cables are rated “Top Secret”; second the inherent bias of US government personnel towards Israel; and third, only a small fraction of the leaked cables have actually been published so far. Indeed, during an interview with Al Jazeera this week, Julian Assange claimed they had thousands of cables on Israel still to come, including material on the al-Mabhouh assassination and the July 2006 war.

Also, of note is a graph illustrating the composition of the cables cache on the Wikileaks website. It appears to show that around 2000 cables from the US consulate in Jerusalem are still to come. These could be more interesting than the cables released so far (almost all from the embassy in Tel Aviv).

To be continued, in all likelihood.

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