

PLOCCA 2002:

Empty Words

by [Matthew Levitt \(/experts/matthew-levitt\)](/experts/matthew-levitt)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Matthew Levitt \(/experts/matthew-levitt\)](/experts/matthew-levitt)

Matthew Levitt is the Fromer-Wexler Fellow and director of the Reinhard Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence at The Washington Institute.



Brief Analysis

The State Department recently submitted its semiannual Palestine Liberation Organization Commitments Compliance Act (PLOCCA) report to Congress, assessing PLO and Palestinian Authority (PA) compliance with commitments made under the Israeli-Palestinian peace accords during the period June 15, 2001–December 15, 2001. The report acknowledges some PA shortcomings over the reporting period, but glosses over many gross violations of PA-PLO peace commitments throughout this period.

In drawing its conclusions, the report did not take into account evidence of PA support for and involvement in terrorism laid out in approximately 500,000 documents Israel seized from PA offices in the course of Operation Defensive Shield. But there is good reason to expect that the U.S. government will find much of value in the seized Israeli documents. Ambassador Francis X. Taylor, the State Department's coordinator for counterterrorism, recently commented, "We don't have any question about the authenticity of the documents provided by the Israeli Government." Therefore, it is instructive to see where the documents shed light on issues discussed in the PLOCCA report.

Once the material seized by Israel has been reviewed by the U.S. intelligence community—a process that, presumably, will be completed shortly—it would be appropriate to issue an updated version of the PLOCCA report, incorporating the additional information about PLO-PA activities during the June 15–December 15 period.

Financing Terrorism

The current report acknowledges that Fatah elements "were frequently involved in acts of violence," but maintains "there is no conclusive evidence that these elements acted with the prior approval and encouragement of the PLO and PA leaderships." The documents seized by Israel include a letter dated September 16, 2001, from "Palestinian al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades" to Fouad Shubaki, Yasir Arafat's moneyman and the moving force behind the Karine-A smuggling affair, requesting funds for electrical and chemical materials to manufacture explosives, explaining that "the cost of one ready explosive charge is 700 shekels at least. We require on a weekly basis 5-9 explosive charges for squads in various areas." Handwritten notes read, "5,000 Shekels per week x 4 = 20,000 shekels per month." The letter notes the cost of bullets, adding "we need bullets on a daily basis." In another seized letter, dated September 9,

2001, Fatah leader Hassan al-Shaykh requests \$2,500 for Ra'ed el Karmi, Ziad Da'as, and Amar Qadan, al-Aqsa terrorists involved in the January 17, 2002, bat mitzva party attack in Hadera. At the bottom of the page, a handwritten note signed by Arafat on September 19 instructs the PA Treasury to allocate \$600 to each of them. Multiple documents show Arafat approving payments to terrorists (often after altering the amount), including some on the list of thirty-six people that Gen. Anthony Zinni presented to Arafat for arrest.

Participation in Terror Attacks

According to the PLOCCA report, "there is no conclusive evidence that the senior leaderships of the PA or PLO were involved in planning or approving specific acts of violence." Evidence to the contrary reveals that Maher Fares, head of military intelligence in Nablus, directed a terrorist cell that placed a bomb on a Tel Aviv bus on December 28, 2000, among other attacks instigated by the group. On this issue, it is particularly instructive to look at reports from the PA's General Intelligence (GI) that were seized by Israel. In one, the GI head in Tulkarm described as "qualitative and successful" the operations of a cell led by Ziad Da'as, and reported to West Bank GI chief Tawfiq Tirawi that "the members of this squad are close to us and maintain ongoing coordination and contacts with us." Another GI report discusses arms procurement for Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and Hamas by deputy head of Preventive Security in Jenin Jamal Switat, as well as his recruitment of a suicide bomber from within GI who carried out a November 2001 suicide bombing in Afula.

Lack of Security Cooperation

"On a number of occasions," notes the PLOCCA report, the PA "took action" against Islamic groups that rejected calls for a ceasefire, but "PA efforts to control violence were not consistent or effective." In fact, the documents seized by Israel show that the PA facilitated the continuation of violence. One document shows that Palestinian GI passed to its Ramallah office a list of 232 terrorists wanted by Israel, asking the office to "please inform the brothers whose names are mentioned above to take cautionary measures." In at least two instances, PA security services knew of pending suicide attacks but took no action to prevent them or inform Israeli authorities.

Commitment to a Negotiated Solution

PLOCCA states, "the renunciation of violence and the pursuit of a negotiated solution to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians have remained the official policy of both the PLO and the PA." But the seized documents include a letter to Israeli Arabs dated September 30, 2001, sent via the PA "liaison committee" from Arafat's bureau and printed on stationery marked "Palestine Liberation Organization, Palestine National Authority, Office of the President." It calls for "one national dream" shared by Palestinians in the territories and in Israel proper, and predicts: "Yes, we will draw up with blood the map of the one homeland and the one people." The letter refers to Israelis as "robbers," "killers of children, women and the elderly" and "plunderers," and to Israeli Arabs as "our families and great people in the towns and villages of the steadfast resistance of 1948."

Failure to Use Available Evidence

Recently collected documentary evidence aside, the PLOCCA report failed to make use of the full range of material that has long been available. For instance, the section on incitement states that "some senior PLO and PA leaders did little to prevent—and may even have encouraged—an atmosphere of incitement to violence in the Palestinian media and through the public statements of Palestinian officials." This is not a fair presentation of the factual record, which includes countless incendiary public statements made by senior PA and PLO officials, such as the December 7, 2001, statement by Ikrima Sabri, the PA-employed mufti of Jerusalem, supporting suicide attacks: "we must not stand in the way of the intifada and jihad. Rather, we must stand at their side and encourage them." Additionally, the report does not make use of important documentary evidence collected in 2001. For instance, the report refers to documents seized by Israel in August 2001 at Orient House only in the context of discussing whether the PA

maintained offices in Jerusalem in violation of Israeli-Palestinian agreements. It does not mention that the Orient House documents included requests addressed to Faisal Husseini (then Arafat's Jerusalem representative) for further funding of terrorist activities; orders signed by Arafat to pay Tanzim operatives; and documents relating to the U.S.-based Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development, a Hamas front organization shut down by U.S. authorities last December.

Conclusion

At a time when the administration is pressing the PA to reform itself by becoming more open and transparent and by establishing clear lines of responsibility, it is disappointing to find a U.S. government document shying away from hard truths and hiding behind disingenuous formulations. It is important to hold the PA fully accountable for its commitments. Unless an amended report is issued quickly, calls for PA transparency and compliance with commitments may well be read in the West Bank and Gaza as "kalam fadi," empty words.

Matthew Levitt is a senior fellow in terrorism studies at The Washington Institute.

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