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Country Reports on Terrorism 2013 - Foreign Terrorist Organizations: Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine

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aka PFLP; Halhul Gang; Halhul Squad; Palestinian Popular Resistance Forces; PPRF; Red Eagle Gang; Red Eagle Group; Red Eagles; Martyr Abu-Ali Mustafa Battalion

Description: Designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization on October 8, 1997, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a Marxist-Leninist group founded by George Habash, broke away from the Arab Nationalist Movement in 1967. The group earned a reputation for large-scale international attacks in the 1960s and 1970s, including airline hijackings that killed at least 20 U.S. citizens. A leading faction within the PLO, the PFLP has long accepted the concept of a two-state solution but has opposed specific provisions of various peace initiatives.

Activities: The PFLP stepped up its operational activity during the Second Intifada. This was highlighted by at least two suicide bombings since 2003, multiple joint operations with other Palestinian terrorist groups, and the assassination of Israeli Tourism Minister Rehavam Ze'evi in 2001, to avenge Israel's killing of the PFLP Secretary General earlier that year. In 2008 and 2009, the PFLP was involved in several rocket attacks launched primarily from Gaza against Israel, and claimed responsibility for numerous attacks on Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in Gaza, including a December 2009 ambush of Israeli soldiers in central Gaza. The PFLP claimed responsibility for numerous mortar and rocket attacks fired from Gaza into Israel in 2010, as well as an attack on a group of Israeli citizens. In October 2011, the PFLP claimed responsibility for a rocket attack that killed one civilian in Ashqelon.

In August 2012, the Israeli Shin Bet security agency arrested a cell of PFLP militants on suspicion of engaging in terrorist activities. The group of militants, three of whom were previously imprisoned, was accused of plotting to carry out shooting attacks on IDF checkpoints in the West Bank, and planning to kidnap an Israeli IDF soldier. In December 2012, Israeli authorities arrested 10 more members of the PFLP and charged them with attempted kidnapping. The suspects were allegedly planning to kidnap an Israeli soldier to use as leverage in a prisoner swap for PFLP head Ahmad Sadaat, who is incarcerated by the Israelis for his role in a number of terrorist attacks.

There were no known PFLP attacks in 2013, although a spokesman for the Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades, the armed wing of the PFLP, commented that the group received training in Damascus from Hizballah.

Strength: Unknown

Location/Area of Operation: Syria, Lebanon, Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza.

Funding and External Aid: Leadership received safe haven in Syria.