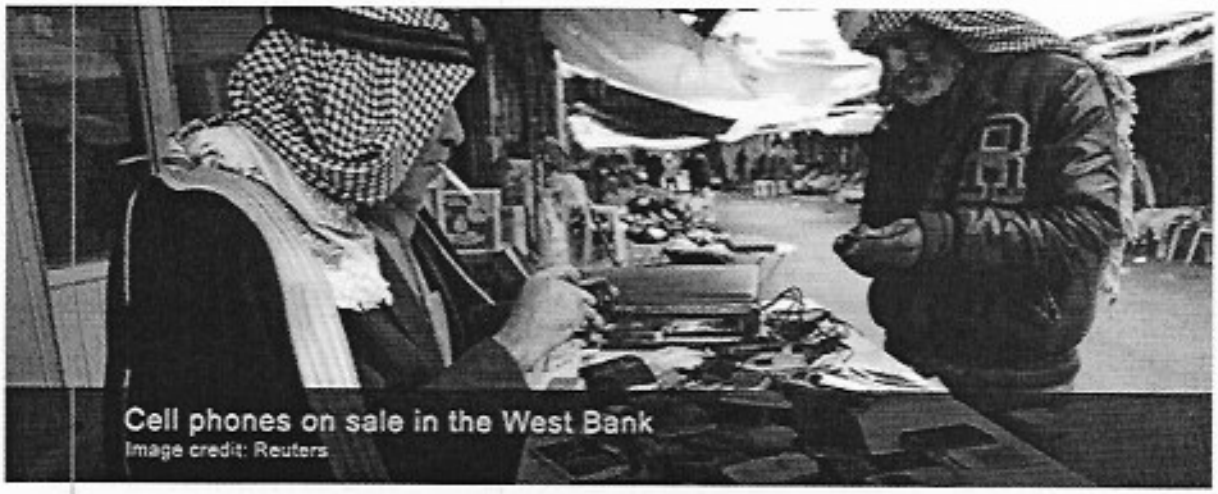
Ex-spy chief claims Palestinian officials worked with CIA to wiretap opponents

February 7, 2018 by Joseph Fitsanakis 1 Comment



Cell phones on sale in the West Bank
Image credit: Reuters

BY **JOSEPH FITSANAKIS** | SENIOR EDITOR | **intel**News.org

The former head of the Palestinian Authority's spy agency claims that the Palestinian government in the West Bank worked with the United States Central Intelligence Agency to wiretap thousands without court authorization. Tawfiq Tirawi, who headed the Palestinian General Intelligence from its founding in 1994 to 2008, has filed an official complaint against the Palestinian Authority and is calling for a criminal investigation into the alleged wiretaps. The complaint has also been signed by Jawad Obeidat, who is the president of the West Bank's Bar Association. It is based on a leaked 37-page document that surfaced last month on the social networking application WhatsApp. The document was leaked by an anonymous individual who claims to have worked for a surveillance unit in the Palestinian Preventive Security Service, the Palestinian Authority's domestic security service.

The leaked document appears to show that the Palestinian Preventive Security Service reached out to the CIA in 2013 asking for assistance with installing a communications surveillance system in the West Bank. The CIA agreed to provide the system in exchange for access to the intercepted data. The two agencies installed the interception system in the summer of 2014 and initiated what appears to have been a large-scale operation that included thousands of telephone subscribers. Initial targets of the operation included members of Hamas —the Palestinian group that controls the Gaza Strip— as well as members of the Iran-supported Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine. But, according to the Associated Press, over time the targets of the program expanded to include "thousands of Palestinians, from senior figures in militant groups to judges, lawyers, civic leaders and political allies of Abbas". The list of targets included Tirawi and Obeidat, who filed the official complaint on Tuesday.

The anonymous leaker of the document said he decided to quit his job and reveal the information about the intercepts after US President Donald Trump shifted Washington's policy on Israel's capital, by officially recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of the Jewish state. Earlier in February, the Palestinian Authority dismissed the leaked document as "nonsense" and said it was part of a large conspiracy that sought to harm Palestinian interests. The CIA refused to comment on the allegations.