
Arafat Lives

Efraim Karsh

NO SOONER was Yasir Arafat declared dead at the French military hospital to which he had been dramatically rushed in early November than a vast cohort of world leaders, from King Abdullah of Jordan to French President Jacques Chirac, began to voice hopes for a quick revival of the Middle East peace process. “The best tribute to President Arafat’s memory will be to intensify our efforts to establish a peaceful and viable state of Palestine,” declared the European Union’s foreign-policy chief, Javier Solana. At the same time, Solana unveiled a new plan to facilitate the so-called road map drafted in 2003 by the EU, the U.S., Russia, and the UN—but in “a less incremental manner”: that is, by deleting the proviso conditioning progress toward the creation of a Palestinian state on a cessation of violence and terrorism.

Tony Blair, the British prime minister, echoed Solana’s view. In 2003, in the run-up to the Iraq war, Blair had sought to pacify his domestic critics by urging on George W. Bush at least the appearance of “progress” between the Israelis and Palestinians before confronting Saddam Hussein. As the war unfolded, and as his popularity at home and in Europe plummeted, Blair kept on repeating the theme. In October 2004, he told a Labor-party conference that he would make Middle East peace

“a personal priority” after the U.S. elections; a few weeks later, he responded to Bush’s reelection with an emphatic call for a renewed effort to resolve this “single most pressing political challenge in our world today.” After all, said Blair, an agreement between Israel and the Palestinians would help critically in “resolving the conditions and causes on which the terrorists prey.”

Blair’s conviction that the revival of the Middle East peace process would alleviate the situation in Iraq and reduce the threat of international terrorism struck a responsive chord in some quarters in the United States as well. “As Mr. Blair, the Europeans, and Arab states like Egypt constantly point out, the Israeli-Palestinian stalemate feeds Muslim anger and despair, giving a larger rationale to terrorist groups like al Qaeda and to the insurgency in Iraq,” ran an editorial in the *New York Times*. “Before the Iraq war,” the paper continued, “Mr. Bush had been told that ‘the road to Jerusalem passed through Baghdad,’ but with Iraq today a magnet for anti-Western fervor, it is increasingly believed in the region that the formula is the other way around.” Former Presidents Jimmy Carter and George H.W. Bush, who during their own terms in office had helped foster Arab-Israeli dialogue, hastened to add their separate articulations of this same idea.

Nevertheless, when he arrived in Washington on November 11 as the first foreign leader to visit the White House since the elections, Blair failed to

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persuade the American President either to endorse an international peace conference in London early next year or to appoint a personal envoy to the Middle East. "I'm all for conferences," the President told a joint press briefing, "just so long as the conferences produce something." He then proceeded to reiterate his commitment to the strategic vision he had outlined in June 2002—namely, that Palestinian democratization would have to precede rather than follow the creation of an independent state. While he promised "to use the next four years to spend the capital of the United States" on the creation of such a state, Bush made it eminently clear that the onus was on the Palestinians to ensure that this objective was achieved:

It is impossible to think that the President of the United States or the prime minister of Great Britain can impose our vision. I think it's unrealistic to say, "Well, Bush wants it done," or, "Blair wants it done," therefore it'll happen. . . . If you choose not to be helped, if you decide you don't want a free, democratic society, there's nothing we can do. If you think you can have peace without democracy, again, I think you'll find that—I can only speak for myself—that I will be extremely doubtful that it will ever happen.

At the heart of Bush's words is an approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict fundamentally at odds with the one endorsed by most of the international community. In order to understand the role played by Yasir Arafat in creating the present impasse between Israel and the Palestinians, it helps to have some notion of what is at stake between these two contending visions.

THE BELIEF that Arabs and Israelis can be forced into a lasting peace by outside influence is based on a perception of Middle Eastern politics as an offshoot of global power politics. There is a long history—political, military, and diplomatic—behind this perception, which informed the actions of generations of modern policy-makers in Europe and elsewhere. Unfortunately, the perception is wrong.

Even at the weakest point in their modern history, during World War I and its immediate aftermath, local Middle Eastern actors were decisive in the restructuring of their region. It was not British officialdom but Hussein ibn Ali of the Hashemite family who drove the British to entertain seriously the notion of destroying the Ottoman empire. Impressed by Hussein's promises to raise the Arabic-speaking Ottoman subjects in revolt, Sir Arthur

Henry McMahon, the British high commissioner in Egypt, accepted his vision of an Arab successor empire and (tentatively) agreed to his main territorial demands. Hussein's and McMahon's initiative would have a considerable impact on the future shape of the Middle East. The emirate of Transjordan (later to be known as the Kingdom of Jordan), for example, was established in 1921 to satisfy the imperial ambitions of Hussein's second son Abdullah, while in the same year the modern state of Iraq was created on behalf of and very much at the instigation of Abdullah's younger brother Faisal.

The bargaining power of local states was substantially enhanced during the cold-war era, when global polarization and the nuclear balance of terror constrained great-power maneuverability. For all their exertions, neither the United States nor the Soviet Union, the two powers that had supplanted the traditional European empires after World War II, had a decisive say in their smaller allies' grand strategies. Time and again they were powerless to contain undesirable regional developments, whether it was Egypt's defection to the American camp in the mid-1970's or the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, or were forced to acquiesce in actions with which they were in total disagreement.

It was on the cardinal issues of war and peace that superpower influence proved least effective. Just as the United States could not force its Arab allies and Israel to accept its position on a political settlement, so the Soviets failed to persuade most of their Arab partners to disavow their total rejection of Israel. Just as Israel launched the 1967 Six-Day war without Washington's blessing when it saw its existence threatened, so Egypt's war of attrition (1969-70) and October war (1973), Syria's military intervention in Lebanon (1976), and the Iraqi invasions of Iran (1980) and Kuwait (1990) took place against Soviet wishes and advice. Only in terminating hostilities did superpower intervention seem to carry any weight, if of a very limited kind and mostly where Israel was concerned. The Soviets failed to convince Egyptian president Anwar Sadat to accept a ceasefire on the first day of the October 1973 war, or to force Syrian president Hafez al-Assad to stop his offensive against the PLO in the summer of 1976.

This is not to say that the U.S. and the USSR slavishly followed the wishes of their junior partners. Rather, whatever success they had was due largely to the convergence of their own wishes with indigenous trends. In the late 1970's, it was the determination of Sadat and Israeli prime minister

Menachem Begin to end the long-standing enmity between their peoples that rendered American mediation effective. But when the Carter administration attempted to sustain the momentum and bring the Palestinians into the picture, it ran into the brick wall of PLO rejectionism. "This is a lousy deal," Yasir Arafat told the American Edward Said, who had passed him the administration's offer. "We want Palestine. We're not interested in bits of Palestine. We don't want to negotiate with the Israelis. We're going to fight."

Twenty-one years later, Arafat aborted two more presidential attempts to mediate peace with Israel by rejecting, in July and December 2000, Bill Clinton's proposals for the creation of an independent Palestinian state in 95 percent of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with east Jerusalem as its capital. Even after Israel had confined Arafat to his Ramallah compound following the launch of his war of terror in September 2000, and even after President Bush had urged the Palestinians to substitute a new and democratic leadership for Arafat's corrupt and oppressive regime, there was little Washington could do to enforce this vision; Bush was forced to watch helplessly as his own preferred candidate, Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), was unceremoniously subverted by Arafat.

LET US assume for the sake of argument that combined U.S.-European pressure succeeded in driving Israelis and Palestinians into a formal peace treaty. Would this, as Blair and others assume, eliminate violence from the wider Middle East or ameliorate the challenge of Islamic terrorism? Hardly—for the simple reason that the Palestinian question has next to nothing to do with either of these.

For one thing, violence was an integral part of Middle Eastern political culture long before the advent of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and physical force remains today the main if not the sole instrument of regional political discourse. For another, the Arab states have never had any real stake in the "liberation of Palestine." Though anti-Zionism has been the core principle of pan-Arab solidarity since the mid-1930s—it is easier, after all, to unite people through a common hatred than through a shared loyalty—pan-Arabism has almost always served as an instrument for achieving the self-interested ends of those who proclaim it.

Consider, for example, the pan-Arab invasion of the newly proclaimed state of Israel in 1948. This, on its face, was a shining demonstration of solidarity with the Palestinian people. But the invasion

had far less to do with winning independence for the indigenous population than with the desire of the Arab regimes for territorial aggrandizement. Transjordan's King Abdullah wanted to incorporate substantial parts of mandatory Palestine into the greater Syrian empire he coveted; Egypt wanted to prevent that eventuality by laying its hands on southern Palestine. Syria and Lebanon sought to annex the Galilee, while Iraq viewed the 1948 war as a stepping stone in its long-standing ambition to bring the entire Fertile Crescent under its rule. Had the Jewish state lost the war, its territory would not have fallen to the Palestinians but would have been divided among the invading Arab forces.

During the decades following the 1948 war, the Arab states manipulated the Palestinian national cause to their own ends. Neither Egypt nor Jordan allowed Palestinian self-determination in the parts of Palestine they had occupied during the 1948 war (respectively, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip). Palestinian refugees were kept in squalid camps for decades as a means of whipping Israel and stirring pan-Arab sentiments. "The Palestinians are useful to the Arab states as they are," Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser candidly responded to an inquiring Western reporter in 1956. "We will always see that they do not become too powerful." As late as 1974, Syria's Hafez al-Assad referred to Palestine as being "not only a part of the Arab homeland but a basic part of southern Syria."

If the Arab states have shown little empathy for the plight of ordinary Palestinians, the Islamic connection to the Palestinian problem is even more tenuous. It is not out of concern for a Palestinian right to national self-determination but as part of a holy war to prevent the loss of a part of the "House of Islam" that Islamists inveigh against the Jewish state of Israel. In the words of the covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement, better known by its Arabic acronym Hamas: "The land of Palestine has been an Islamic trust (*waqf*) throughout the generations and until the day of resurrection. . . . When our enemies usurp some Islamic lands, jihad becomes a duty binding on all Muslims."

In this respect, there is no difference between Palestine and other parts of the world conquered by the forces of Islam throughout history. To this very day, for example, Arabs and many Muslims unabashedly pine for the restoration of Spain, and look upon their expulsion from that country in 1492 as a grave historical injustice.

Indeed, even countries that have never been under Islamic imperial rule have become legitimate targets of radical Islamic fervor. Since the late

1980's, various Islamist movements have looked upon the growing number of French Muslims as a sign that France, too, has become a potential part of the House of Islam. Their British counterparts have followed suit. "We will remodel this country in an Islamic image," the London-based preacher Sheikh Omar Bakri Muhammad told an attentive audience less than two months after 9/11. "We will replace the Bible with the Qur'an."

This goal need not necessarily be pursued by the sword; it can be achieved through demographic growth and steady conversion to Islam. But should peaceful means prove insufficient, physical force can readily be brought to bear. As illustrated by the overwhelming support for the 9/11 attacks throughout the Arab and Islamic worlds, this vision is by no means confined to a disillusioned and obscurantist fringe of Islam. Islam's war for world mastery is a traditional, indeed venerable, quest, and is far from over. In the words of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the founding father of the avowedly imperialist regime in Iran:

The Iranian revolution is not exclusively that of Iran, because Islam does not belong to any particular people. . . . We will export our revolution throughout the world because it is an Islamic revolution. The struggle will continue until the calls, "there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah," are echoed all over the world.

Within this grand scheme, the struggle between Israel and the Palestinians is but a single element, and one whose supposed centrality looms far greater in Western than in Islamic eyes.

THIS IS not to deny that resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a pressing issue. But the global ramifications of any settlement will be far narrower than is assumed by well-meaning statesmen like Tony Blair. Quite to the contrary, the best hope of peace between Arabs and Israelis lies in the *rejection* of the spurious "link" between this dispute and other regional and global problems.

The pretense of pan-Arab or pan-Islamic solidarity has long served as a dangerous elixir in Palestinian political circles, stirring unrealistic hopes and expectations and, at key junctures, inciting widespread and horrifically destructive violence. The sooner the Palestinians recognize that their cause is theirs alone, the sooner are they likely to make their own peace with the existence of the state of Israel and to understand the necessity of a negotiated settlement. Toward this end, a good

place to start would be in eradicating the disastrous legacy of Yasir Arafat, the so-called "nation-builder."

With the exception of Haj Amin al-Husseini, the mufti of Jerusalem who led the Palestinian Arabs from the early 1920's to the late 1940's, Arafat did more than any other person in modern Middle Eastern history to *retard* the development of Palestinian civil society and the attainment of Palestinian statehood. Had the mufti led his people to peace and reconciliation with their Jewish neighbors, as he promised the British officials who appointed him to his high rank, the Palestinians would have had their independent state in a substantial part of Mandatory Palestine by 1948, and would have been spared the traumatic experience of dispersion and exile. Had Arafat set the PLO from the start on the path to peace and reconciliation, instead of turning it into the most murderous terrorist organization in modern times, a Palestinian state could have been established in the late 1960's or the early 1970's, in 1979 as a corollary to the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, by May 1999 as part of the Oslo process, or at the very latest with the Camp David summit of July 2000.

But then, for all his rhetoric about Palestinian independence, Arafat was never as interested in statehood as in the violence attending its pursuit. As far back as 1968, he famously declared that "Palestine was lost in blood and iron, and it can only be recovered by blood and iron," and he never strayed from this track, though most of the blood he shed had little to do with the "recovery" of Palestine.

In 1970 Arafat nearly brought about the destruction of Jordan, which had generously allowed the Palestinians to use its territory for attacks on Israel. Five years later, he helped trigger the horrendous Lebanese civil war, one of the bloodiest conflicts in modern Middle Eastern history, which raged on for more than a decade and claimed hundreds of thousands of innocent lives. In 1990-91 he supported the brutalization of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein, at an exorbitant cost to the Palestinians living there, thousands of whom were murdered in revenge attacks and hundreds of thousands expelled after Kuwait's liberation.

In between these disasters, Arafat made the Palestinian national movement synonymous with violence and terrorism. Notwithstanding the PLO's rhetoric about "armed struggle," only a tiny fraction of its operations, both prior to the 1967 Six-Day war and later, were directed against military targets; most were aimed at innocent civilians. Palestinian terrorists planted bombs in public

places, shelled population centers, and attacked villages and towns, taking hostages and murdering men, women, and children. In the late 1960's the PLO introduced attacks on civilian air traffic—mostly bombings and hijackings—into the arsenal of international terrorism. In the 1990's the Palestinians turned suicide bombings, hitherto an esoteric and rarely used method, into the most salient and effective means of modern terror.

And Palestinian statehood? In the late 1970's, Arafat told his close friend and collaborator, the Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, that the Palestinians lacked the tradition, unity, and discipline to become a formal state, and that a Palestinian state would be a failure from the first day. In the 1990's, once given control of the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza as part of the Oslo peace process, he made this bleak prognosis a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Within a short time of its establishment, the Palestinian Authority (PA) had literally become the largest police state in the world, with one policeman for every 40 residents. Backed by a dozen security and intelligence services, all answering directly to Arafat, these forces were ostensibly designed to enforce law and order and to combat anti-Israel terrorism. In reality they served as Arafat's tool vis-à-vis his Palestinian subjects, as an instrument of terror against Israel, and as guardian of the extensive protection and racketeering networks that sprang up in the territories under the PA's control. The largest of these operations were run by top security figures like Muhammad Dahlan in Gaza and Jibril Rajoub in the West Bank, but lower-ranking officials developed their own extortionist techniques, forcing landowners to sell them plots of land at marked-down prices, siphoning a percentage of land and property sales, and coercing ordinary citizens to pay protection money for securing basic rights and services.

On a higher level, Arafat gave control of the Palestinian economy to a group of cronies through a network of monopolies whose revenues never reached the Palestinian population. Into secret bank accounts abroad he siphoned hundreds of millions of dollars donated by the international community for the benefit of the civilian Palestinian population. The surrealist nature of this practice was starkly illustrated in Arafat's last days when his wife Suha, whose sumptuous life in Paris was reportedly financed to the tune of \$100,000-\$200,000 a month, and who was a major shareholder in a number of large monopolies, would not release her husband's body for burial before impos-

ing her financial conditions on his successors. These, for their part, hired the services of a detective agency to try to trace their chieftain's hidden billions.

SHORTLY BEFORE moving to Gaza in the summer of 1994 to take control of the newly established PA, Arafat told an associate that he had signed the Oslo agreement only because doing so would facilitate Israel's eventual demise. "I know that you are opposed to the Oslo accords," this former colleague has recently quoted Arafat as saying,

but you must always remember what I'm going to tell you. The day will come when you will see thousands of Jews fleeing Palestine. I will not live to see this, but you will definitely see it in your lifetime. The Oslo accords will help bring this about.

In fact, Arafat never hid from his own people how he saw the Oslo process: as a means not to a two-state solution—Israel and a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza—but to the substitution of a Palestinian state for the state of Israel.

As early as September 8, 1993, five days before signing the Israeli-Palestinian declaration of principles (DOP), Arafat told an Israeli journalist who came to interview him in his Tunis headquarters: "In the future, Israel and Palestine will be one united state in which Israelis and Palestinians will live together"—that is, Israel would no longer exist. And even as he shook Yitzhak Rabin's hand on the White House lawn, Arafat was assuring the Palestinians in a pre-recorded Arabic-language message broadcast by Jordanian TV that the DOP was merely an implementation of the PLO's "phased strategy" of June 1974. This stipulated that the Palestinians should seize whatever territory Israel was prepared or compelled to cede and use it as a springboard for further territorial gains until achieving the "complete liberation of Palestine."

During the next seven years, until the launch of his terrorist war in late September 2000, Arafat played an intricate game of Jekyll-and-Hyde. Addressing Israeli or Western audiences, he would habitually extol the "peace of the brave" he had signed with "my partner Yitzhak Rabin." To his Palestinian constituents, he would simultaneously depict the peace accords as momentary and transient arrangements. He made constant allusions not only to the "phased strategy" but to the "right of return," a standard Palestinian euphemism for Israel's destruction through demographic subversion. He also leavened his speech with historical

and religious references, most notably alluding to the treaty of Hudaibiya, signed by the Prophet Muhammad with the people of Mecca in 628 only to be disavowed by Muhammad a couple of years later when the situation shifted in his favor.

Further to discredit the idea of peace with the Jewish state, Arafat's PA launched a sustained hate campaign of racial and political incitement, ongoing to this day and unparalleled in scope and intensity since Nazi Germany. Israelis, and Jews more generally, have been portrayed as the source of all evil, synonyms for iniquity, corruption, and decadence, and responsible for every problem, real or imaginary, in the West Bank and Gaza. Palestinians are not only indoctrinated in the illegitimacy of the state of Israel and the lack of any Jewish connection to the land but are also told of the most outlandish Israeli plots to corrupt and ruin them, wholly congruent with the medieval myth of Jews as secret destroyers and well-poisoners.

Arafat himself led the way in this campaign, charging Israel with killing Palestinian children to get their internal organs, masterminding the suicide bombings of its own civilians, and flooding the territories with weapons in order to precipitate a Palestinian civil war. The Palestinian Authority's minister of health, Riad Zaanun, accused Israeli doctors of using "Palestinian patients for experimental medicines," while the Palestinian representative to the UN's Human Rights Commission in Geneva charged that Israel had injected Palestinian children with the AIDS virus. The director of the PA's committee for consumer protection accused Israel of distributing chocolate infected with "mad cow disease" in the Palestinian territories. The PA minister of ecology, Yusuf Abu Safiyah, indicted Israel for "dumping liquid waste . . . in Palestinian areas in the West Bank and Gaza." Suha Arafat famously amplified one such charge when, in the presence of Hillary Clinton, she told an audience in Gaza in November 1999 that "our people have been subjected to the daily and extensive use of poisonous gas by the Israeli forces, which has led to an increase in cancer cases among women and children." Little wonder that Arafat's death last November was quickly followed by widespread charges of Israeli poisoning.

Arafat also utilized the immense inflammatory potential of Islam to discredit his Israeli peace partners, if not the idea of peace itself. Week after week, Palestinian preachers used their pulpits to discredit the peace process and to instill hatred for Israelis and Jews. Worshippers have been taught that Jews are the "descendants of apes and pigs"

and warned of Zionist machinations to divide the Palestinian people and spawn internecine strife. After Arafat launched his war of terror in September 2000, the Friday preachers embarked on an orgy of anti-Jewish invective and outright calls for the mass murder of Israelis and Jews wherever they were found.

Children have occupied a place of pride in the PA's hate campaign. Over the last decade, Palestinian children have learned about an evil Jewish persona, traceable to biblical times and supposedly accounting for the worldwide persecution of Jews through the ages. In particular they have been indoctrinated with the idea that Jews are, and always have been, implacable enemies of Islam. As they grow up, Palestinian children can join various youth organizations where they are further brainwashed with racist and anti-Semitic ideology. An extensive network of summer camps, modeled on the Nazi youth organization, Hitler Jugend, provides a carefully contrived mixture of ideological indoctrination and military training to thousands of Palestinian youth every year. The camps are named after "martyrs" or spectacular "acts of martyrdom" (i.e., terrorist attacks), and participants are thoroughly imbued with the virtues of death and "martyrdom."

Nor did Arafat confine himself to simply disparaging his peace partner. Making violence the defining characteristic of his rule, he built an extensive terrorist infrastructure in the territories under his control. He refused to disarm the terrorist organizations Hamas and Islamic Jihad (as required by the Oslo accords) and tacitly approved the murder of hundreds of Israelis by these groups. He also reconstructed the PLO's old terrorist apparatus, mainly under the auspices of the Tanzim, the military arm of Fatah (the PLO's largest constituent organization and Arafat's own alma mater). He frantically acquired large quantities of prohibited weapons, and, eventually, resorted to outright mass violence, first in September 1996 to discredit the newly elected Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and then in September 2000, shortly after being offered Palestinian statehood by Netanyahu's successor, Ehud Barak, with the launch of his terror war.

BUT ARAFAT is hardly the only Arab leader to have used mass violence for political ends, to foster a cult of anti-Semitism, or to line his own pockets at his people's expense. He was a typical, if egregious, product of the ruthless Arab political system and a quintessential representative of a generation of cynical and self-seeking "revolutionaries."

Nor have his main Palestinian associates been any better. While ordinary Palestinians have scabbled for a livelihood, PLO officials have enjoyed a luxurious life in sumptuous hotels and villas, globe-trotting in grand style, acquiring properties, and making financial investments worldwide—all from the billions of dollars donated by the Arab oil states and, during the Oslo era, by the international community.

Neither was Arafat alone in his political philosophy. The rejection of the state of Israel and the need for its violent destruction have been constants within the PLO since the days of its hallowed founding document, the Palestinian Covenant, adopted in 1964 and revised four years later to reflect the organization's growing militancy. Having little to say about the Palestinians themselves, the covenant devotes about two-thirds of its 33 articles to the need to destroy Israel, designating "armed struggle" as "the only way to liberate Palestine." Despite signing no fewer than five peace agreements with Israel during the 1990's, the PLO has failed to abolish its covenant as promised and has in fact never shed its total rejection of the Jewish state.

Finally, such attitudes are by no means confined to "hard line" elements within the PLO, like its "foreign minister" Farouq Qadoumi, but are a commonplace among supposed moderates as well. The late Faisal Husseini, widely considered a dove, famously likened the Oslo accords to a Trojan horse designed to bring about Israel's eventual demise. Yasser Abed Rabbo, a co-signatory to the 2003 "Geneva Accords," persistently denied Jewish attachment to the Temple Mount, and by extension to the land of Israel, and vowed to regain "all of Palestine." So did Nabil Shaath, another supposed moderate and dedicated advocate of the Oslo process, and Ahmed Qureia (Abu Ala), chief negotiator of the Oslo accord. "We did not sign a peace treaty with Israel, but interim agreements that had been imposed on us," he said in June 1996. "When we accepted the Oslo agreement, we obtained territory but not all the Palestinian territory. . . . We did not and will not relinquish one inch of this territory or the right of any Palestinian to live on it with dignity."

Even Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), after Arafat's death the acting chairman of the PA and perhaps the foremost symbol of supposed Palestinian moderation, has not shied away from denying the existence of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem (or for that matter, the legitimacy of the Jewish claim to Palestine) or from hinting at Israel's eventual destruction. In an interview with an Israeli newspaper

in January 1996, for example, Abu Mazen gently restated the PLO's old formula of a democratic state comprising the whole of Palestine, expressing the hope that in the future Jews and Palestinian Arabs "will reach a state of complete mixture" in Palestine. This thinly veiled call for Israel's disappearance was repeated last October in a *New York Times* op-ed by the PLO's legal adviser, Michael Tarazi.

In one way, indeed, Abu Mazen is more extreme than many of his peers. While they revert to standard talk of Israel's illegitimacy, he devoted years of his life to giving ideological firepower to the anti-Israel and anti-Jewish indictment. In a doctoral dissertation written at a Soviet university, an expanded version of which was subsequently published in book form, Abu Mazen endeavored to prove the existence of a close ideological and political association between Zionism and Nazism. Among other things, he argued that fewer than a million Jews had been killed in the Holocaust, and that the Zionist movement was a partner to their slaughter.

In the wake of the failed Camp David summit of July 2000 and the launch of Arafat's war of terror two months later, Abu Mazen went to great lengths to explain why the "right of return" was a non-negotiable prerequisite for any Palestinian-Israeli settlement. "Peace will not be achieved without the refugees getting back their sacred rights, which cannot be touched," he argued. "It is the individual right of every refugee, and no one can reach an agreement in this matter without his consent." To dispel any doubt about the nature of this "right," he emphasized that "the right of return means a return to Israel, not to a Palestinian state."

ON THE assumption that the elections scheduled for January 9 go as forecast, Abu Mazen's succession is thus no more likely to bring peace with Israel, or democracy to the Palestinians, than a new Germany would have been ushered in after World War II by the accession of one of Adolf Hitler's erstwhile lieutenants.

It is true that, during the past couple of years, Abu Mazen openly urged Arafat to scale down his war of terror and to return to the negotiating table. But this was a matter of tactics: Arafat himself had been amenable to negotiating so long as Israel proved sufficiently accommodating of his demands, while Abu Mazen never precluded a return to the "armed struggle" should circumstances so require. During his brief tenure as prime minister in 2003, he made no effort to disarm the numerous armed gangs in the territories as required by the Oslo accords, attempting instead to win their consent for

a temporary suspension of hostilities that would bring about an Israeli withdrawal, something the Palestinians had failed to achieve by military means.

For all their drastically different personalities and political style, Arafat and Abu Mazen are warp and woof of the same fabric: dogmatic PLO veterans who have never eschewed their commitment to Israel's destruction and who have viewed the "peace process" as the continuation of their lifetime war by other means. (A younger and more direct reincarnation of Arafat is Marwan Barghouti, the jailed Fatah terrorist with undisguised political ambitions.) As late as July 2002, Abu Mazen described Oslo as "the biggest mistake Israel ever made," enabling the PLO to get worldwide acceptance and respectability while hanging fast to its own aims. Shortly after Arafat's death this past November, in his address to a special session of the Palestinian Legislative Council in Ramallah, he swore to "follow in the path of the late leader Yasir Arafat and . . . work toward fulfilling his dream. . . . We promise you that our hearts will not rest until the right of return for our people is achieved and the tragedy of the refugees is ended."

One might have hoped that, eleven years and thousands of deaths after the launch of the Oslo process, the international community would pay closer attention to what the Palestinian leadership tells its own people and wider Arab constituencies. But that is evidently a hope too far. Even Bill Clinton, whose dream of brokering a Palestinian-Israeli peace was dashed by Arafat in the July 2000 Camp David summit and again in December of the same year, and who blamed the PLO leader for the collapse of the Oslo process, could suggest five months before Arafat's death that America and Is-

rael had no choice but to resume negotiating with him. "Unless they . . . seriously believe they can find a better negotiating partner in Hamas," he told the British leftist daily *Guardian*, "then they need to keep working to make a deal."

It is precisely here that the great importance of the Bush Doctrine lies. For while the EU seems all too happy to continue asking nothing of the Palestinians, as if they were too dim or too primitive to be held accountable for their own actions, Bush has tackled the issue of accountability head on. In his correct perception, it is the total absence of this factor from Middle Eastern political life that has allowed a long succession of local dictators, from Gamal Abdel Nasser, to Saddam Hussein, to Yasir Arafat, to inflict recurrent disasters and endless suffering on their peoples, and mayhem upon the world.

So long as the Palestinian territories continue to be run by men of this kind and by their terrorist organizations, there can be no true or lasting reconciliation with Israel. And so long as the territories continue to be governed by Arafat's rule of the jungle, no Palestinian civil society, let alone a viable state, can develop. Just as the creation of free and democratic societies in Germany and Japan after World War II necessitated, above and beyond the overthrow of the ruling parties, a comprehensive purge of the existing political elites and the reeducation of the entire populace, so the Palestinians deserve a profound structural reform that will sweep the PA from power, free the territories from its grip, eradicate the endemic violence from political and social life, and teach the virtues of coexistence with their Israeli neighbors. Until this happens, there will be no lasting peace in the Middle East.

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