

THE LEGACY OF YASSER ARAFAT

By Yohanan Ramati

The only thing certain about the illness that killed Yasser Arafat is that his doctors, French as well as Arab, refused to identify it. His last days were marked by deliberate confusion in many fields, fostered partly by himself and partly by other interested parties. Shortly before his death, newspaper reports claimed that he had left a written will designating Farouq Kadoumi as his successor to lead the Fatah movement and Ahmed Qureia (Abu Ala) as Kadoumi's senior minister. Kadoumi left Palestine in protest against the signing of the Oslo Agreement that recognized Israel. He is a much stronger character than Qureia or Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) and maintains good relations with Islamic and other terrorist movements, including Hamas.

Arafat's declared goal was always to destroy the State of Israel in stages. This strategy was endorsed by all Arab states except Jordan. Even by Egypt, as Anwar Sadat admitted to Hafez Assad of Syria after signing the "peace treaty," key parts of which Cairo has never honored. Thus for Arafat the Oslo Agreement was nothing more than a means to obtain a territorial base in Palestine and international recognition. He had no intention of allowing it to lead to peace. He relied on the political efficacy of terrorism, especially against Jews, to promote his stature in the Arab world, where terror against infidels is popular. For this purpose, he used the Fatah's own terrorist groups, at various times named Black September, Force 17, Tanzim and Al-Aqsa Martyrs, while allowing the Hamas and Islamic Jihad free rein. A consummate politician, he simultaneously exploited the endemic anti-Semitism of Europe, gradually attaining a firm base of support for Palestinian nationalism in the Western and Eastern parts of this continent alike.

This background indicates why Arafat preferred the extremist Farouq Kadoumi to the more moderate Abu Mazen, who was next in line in the local Fatah hierarchy. However, Abu Ala wanted to work with Abu Mazen and it seems that together they saw to it that Arafat's will was suppressed. While the commotion that accompanied and followed Arafat's interment in Ramallah was still continuing, an attempt to assassinate Abu Mazen and his strongman Dahlan in a mourning tent erected in Gaza City failed. They escaped unhurt, but two of Abu Mazen's bodyguards were killed. It should be noted that that nobody has been arrested and charged in connection with this incident at the time of writing – a fact speaking volumes about the reliability and effectiveness of the security services supposed to protect the caretaker President.

The assassination attempt warned Abu Mazen – or indeed anyone likely to negotiate with Israel – to reassess their situation. It should also have warned

“the Quartet” that its “road map to peace in the Middle East” will not stop Palestinian terrorism and may well intensify it. However, two Quartet members – the European Community and the UN – appear to be far more interested in Israeli concessions to the PLO than in peace in the Middle East or stopping terrorism.

For obvious reasons, the Abu Mazen-Abu Ala-Dahlan trio wants an uneventful election transferring power quietly to Abu Mazen. At the time of writing, it seems that they might get their wish. The polls taken during November by Palestinian bodies indicate that Abu Mazen will win by a significant margin, gaining up to 41% of the vote. Undoubtedly, a large section of the Palestinian electorate does not think that terrorism helps it to achieve an independent Palestinian state. It prefers independence to terrorism and Abu Mazen represents this position very well, especially as he is on record demanding the “right of return” for Palestinian refugees and insisting on the inclusion of all Judea-Samaria as well as the Gaza Strip in the final borders of the Palestinian state.

The Palestinian elections are set for January 9th 2005. The final list of candidates for Arafat’s positions is incomplete, but at the time of writing Farouq Kadoumi has not put himself forward for the Presidency. The most serious contender to date is the Chairman of the new Palestinian Legislative Council, Hassan Khereisha from Tulkarm, who is wealthy and reportedly acceptable to both the Tanzim and the Hamas. Hamas declared that it intends to boycott the elections. The boycott, however, may not be implemented if a candidate ready to promote Hamas interests enters the contest, or it is decided to support Khereisha.

Despite the polls favoring him, Abu Mazen’s support is greater abroad than at home. He has already been visited by the Foreign Ministers of the United States, Russia, Britain and Spain, all of whom wished him well. Israel would like him to win, though he has proclaimed his adherence to the Palestinians’ “right of return” and will demand borders it is not ready to concede, because it considers him the most likely leader to abjure terrorism, even if he may not be strong enough to suppress it. However, apart from promising that it will withdraw its troops and do everything possible to allow the elections to be held in a peaceful atmosphere, Israel has been careful not to interfere.

On November 21st Abu Mazen returned to Ramallah after spending a futile week in Gaza, where he tried vainly to make peace between the rival Palestinian factions. On the same day, the Tanzim started to collect 250,000 signatures to nominate its jailed leader, Marwan Barghouti, to contest the election, though Israeli leaders stressed that he would not be released, even if elected. Barghouti subsequently withdrew his candidature, asking his supporters to vote for Abu Mazen from whom he may have received the

promise of an important position. His withdrawal will help Abu Mazen but may also increase the number of votes garnered by Khereisha and others.

Intelligence reports predict trouble for Abu Mazen, not so much before the election as afterwards should he win. Despite Marwan Barghouti's support, he is unlikely to gain the votes of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, while despite their protestations to the contrary the votes of Fatah's own terrorists - Tanzim and Al-Aqsa Martyrs (already renamed Yasser Arafat's Martyrs) - remain uncertain. Hamas will not consider supporting him unless he disowns the Quartet's "road map". And the Lebanese Hezbollah, with Iranian help, may bankroll and organize another attempt to assassinate him. Under these circumstances, banking on Abu Mazen to make peace with Israel would be foolhardy. He cannot even afford to meet Ariel Sharon's request to remove hate propaganda against Israel from the school curriculum of Palestinian children and the PA media.

Whether or not the elections pass quietly - and whoever is elected - stability is an uncertain prospect of afterwards. Within Fatah the real power rests with three men controlling armed bodies - Mohammed Dahlan, Musa Arafat and Jibril Rajoub. Dahlan and Musa Arafat are bitter enemies who have resisted all attempts to reconcile them. Both operate mainly in the Gaza Strip. Jibril Rajoub has few supporters in the Strip but very many in Judea-Samaria. This gives him the options of trying to become the main power broker himself or waiting until the battle for control in the Gaza Strip has been decided and then reaching an agreement or confronting whoever wins it. It is doubtful whether any of the three will be a force for stability before this happens.

Besides these three, a large number of militia commanders have considerable influence locally and sometimes use terrorism and protection rackets to replenish their coffers. So a scenario gradually dividing the area under Palestinian Authority control between local militia commanders competing against each other for territory remains a possibility. This would pose difficult problems to "the Quartet", the United States and Israel, exacerbating terrorism and making any kind of serious peace negotiations impossible.

As already mentioned, Israel has opted out of any interference in areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority during the pre-election period. But this is always subject to the proviso that terrorist acts against Jews do not take place and reliable evidence that specific outrages of this nature are about to be performed does not come to hand, necessitating the elimination of "ticking bombs."

The death of Arafat strengthened Ariel Sharon's case for "disengagement" because Western Europe may now press Israel for concessions "to help Abu

Mazen and other moderates.” Apparently, Sharon promised this retreat to Bush receiving in return the President’s written assurances that Israel would not be required to retreat to the 1967 borders in Judea-Samaria. Though the history of American political promises to Israel is not encouraging (most of them could not be relied upon when it mattered), there is an outside chance this one may prove more fruitful. The personnel changes in the Bush administration, and especially the appointment of Condoleezza Rice as Secretary of State, make it easier for Bush to adhere to the legally binding English text of UN Security Council Resolution 242 (which does not require Israel to retreat from all territories occupied during the Six-Day War), instead of persisting with the traditional State Department policy since 1967 of misinterpreting this resolution according to Arab and French wishes. However, it is unclear whether the pressures from the President’s so-called allies in NATO (some of whom, like Spain, fear Moslem terrorism so much that they refuse to fight it) will enable him to do so.

Unfortunately, the persistent double standard the world has applied to the unbridled terrorism of Arafat, which earned him the Nobel Prize for Peace for signing a treaty he did not and never intended to honor, is likely to be inherited by his successors. The United Nations, in sharp contrast to its predecessor, the League of Nations, wants to confine the Jewish state to indefensible borders and condemn it to demographic demise. It regards the Palestinians – the fathers of the Moslem terrorism now threatening non-Moslems around the world – as freedom fighters not responsible for their actions. They could even kill sportsmen at the Munich Olympic Games and United States diplomats with impunity. UN sanctions against the PLO are inconceivable.

The two reasons for this reinforce each other: The first is that dictatorships constitute the overwhelming majority of the 191 UN member-states. This majority includes 48 Moslem states and four more states where Moslems account for 40%-49% of the population. The Moslems are well organized and exercise a decisive influence on the voting patterns of most other dictatorships. It helps that the present UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, comes from Ghana, a country with a Moslem minority of nearly 20%. The second reason is that European democracies are beset by anti-Semitism more intense than at any time since Hitler and therefore, as often as not, cooperate with the dictatorships against the United States, especially where the Middle East is concerned. Western Europe seems worse in this respect than Eastern Europe.

In this situation, Washington is, more than ever, Israel’s only realistic hope. Two of its partners in “the Quartet” are less than lukewarm about its war with terrorism, or indeed about its efforts to promote democracy. The third, Russia, would have been much more promising had the United States ever seriously solicited her cooperation. Both countries would gain

handsomely from this. Russia has plenty of oil for export she would, no doubt, be happy to sell to the US, possibly at prices below those of OPEC if offered a reasonable quid pro quo. This would loosen OPEC's stranglehold on Western and other economies, which has checked economic progress throughout the world. Moreover, having suffered much from Moslem terrorism and well acquainted with its cruelties, the Russians have no sympathy for Western Europe's cowardly fear of it, which often leads to pressures intended to prevent the realization of American foreign policy objectives. Unfortunately, the long American tradition of regarding Russia as a dangerous rival, not a potential ally, may leave the status quo that does not bode well for the United States intact.

Yasser Arafat's chief legacy to posterity is the fanatic, suicidal terrorism that Osama Ben Laden only copied and magnified. At this point of human history, its future prospects are uncertain. Experts regard the possibility that the United States may again be attacked by Al-Qaeda, this time by weapons of mass destruction, possibly nuclear, as very real. And nobody knows the effects a "successful" strike of this nature would have on the popularity of terrorism in the Moslem world (it is as likely to increase as to decrease) or, for that matter, on the reactions in America and Western Europe.

In Palestine, it took four years of sharp Israeli reprisals to create a climate unenthusiastic about using terrorism. It may require a much shorter period without such punishments to restore the enthusiasm for bombing Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Arafat, moreover, was a criminal who stole monies given to his people and put at least two billion dollars into his own private accounts in foreign banks. If his successors behave better, this will not be due to his legacy and example.

WESTERN EUROPE IS AFRAID – THE SPANISH EXAMPLE

On 11 September 2001, nineteen Al-Qaeda suicide bombers hijacked four civilian aircraft. The two boarded in Boston were crashed into the twin towers of the World Trade Center. The plane boarded at Dulles Airport near

Washington DC was crashed into the Pentagon. The fourth plane left from Newark NJ and was crashed near Pittsburg. The twin towers collapsed, killing 2602 innocent people. Another 125 were killed at the Pentagon and 246 more inside the four crashed aircraft. The total number of killed (not counting the 19 hijackers) thus reached 2973. The number of wounded exceeded 6,000.

Exactly 911 days later, on 11th March 2004, four early morning commuter trains to Madrid, Spain were bombed at around 7.40 am during the morning rush hour, imitating the simultaneous hijacking of four early morning commercial flights in the September 11th, 2001 attacks on the United States. The Madrid explosions killed 191 people and wounded more than 1,800. They targeted a busy rail line just south of downtown Madrid. The four trains began their journey at Alcalá de Henares station about half an hour before the explosions and several people, who got off the trains before they departed, placed in them 12 bombs concealed in backpacks or duffel bags. Outside this station stood a parked van containing seven detonators, an audio tape with verses from the Koran and cell phones.

Alcalá de Henares is home to large Latin American and East European communities. This is why 41 of the dead including fifteen Rumanians, five each from Ecuador and Peru, four from Poland, three from Colombia and two from Honduras were not Spanish nationals. The trains from there serve middle class towns and suburbs southeast of Madrid. Many of the 250,000 people using this line daily belong to the lower-middle and middle class and cannot afford to live in the city of Madrid.

Nine of the bombs were on two trains scheduled to reach Atocha station at the same time, the plan being not only to kill the people on them but also to cause the roof of the station to collapse, enormously increasing casualties. However, one of these trains was held up by a red signal and exploded outside the station, while two of the bombs failed to explode. The roof remained intact. Two more bombs exploded on a train when it stopped at El Pozo del Tío Raimundo station. A third bomb on this train also failed to explode. One further bomb exploded on a train at Santa Eugenia station.

Spain's intelligence service immediately opined that radical Muslims were responsible for the outrage. However, the Spanish Government tried for as long as it could to ignore the evidence and place the blame on the Basque separatist group ETA. A general election was impending on March 14th and ETA involvement was expected to benefit the ruling conservative Popular Party (PP) of Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar, which until the bombings had been leading comfortably in public opinion polls. A February poll by Sigma Dos released by Antena 3 TV, gave the PP an 8.1% lead over the Socialist Workers Party of Spain (PSOE), with no other political party expected to get more than 9 seats. On the other hand, if al-Qaeda or another

Moslem terrorist body was responsible, the socialist opposition would gain heavily since the attack would be ascribed to the dispatch of Spanish troops to help the United States in Iraq.

The insistence of all Spanish Government spokesmen and agencies (except the intelligence service) that the Basque ETA was responsible caused Spain some disagreeable moments. The UN Security Council, at Spain's request, reacted immediately by unanimously passing its Resolution No. 1530 condemning "in the strongest terms the bomb attack in Madrid, Spain, perpetrated by the terrorist group ETA." Yet as late as March 15th Spain submitted an unapologetic letter updating the Security Council on the progress of the investigation and repeating that the Spanish government had "the strong conviction" that ETA was involved.

Yet as the evidence that the outrage was perpetrated by Moslems mounted, the Government had to give up its increasingly counterproductive efforts to blame ETA, which denied responsibility and does not use the type of explosive found in the unexploded bombs or the kind of detonators found in the van at Alcalá de Henares. The socialist PSOE meanwhile bravely announced that, if elected to power, it would immediately withdraw the Spanish contingent from Iraq – precisely what the terrorists wanted to achieve. By 17 March, many governments in Europe, including Russia, had protested that Spain had jeopardized their security by feeding them false information about ETA's involvement.

All this largely neutralized the immediate worldwide condemnation of the bombings. The United States, Britain and Russia said the attacks showed the need for a toughened resolve against terrorists. European Commission President Romano Prodi called the attack "ferocious and senseless". Pope John Paul II condemned the bombings in a message to church leaders in Spain. Many nations offered material support to the Spanish government. Only President Fidel Castro of Cuba accused Aznar of deceiving his citizens by blaming ETA when he knew an Islamic group was responsible.

The perpetrators were later proved to be the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM), an extremist fundamentalist organization with links to al-Qaeda. This was hardly surprising since Osama bin Laden had publicly declared his desire to restore Moslem rule in the southern Spanish province of Andalusia (reconquered by Spain in 1492) and in October 2003 threatened suicide bombings against any countries joining the US-led invasion of Iraq and "especially Britain, Spain, Australia, Poland, Japan and Italy." There was documentary evidence that Spain – the most likely to withdraw from Iraq as a result – would be attacked first. The al-Qaeda link to the Madrid bombings set alarm bells ringing across the world.

Spurred by their success at no cost to themselves, GICM tried on April 2nd to bomb the track of the AVE express train to Seville. This proved a serious mistake. The attack failed and shortly afterwards the police identified an apartment in Leganés, also south of Madrid, as the base of operations for the terrorists responsible for it and for the March 11th attack. Several terrorists, headed by Jamal Zougam, Serhane Abdelmaji and Jamal Ahmidan, were trapped inside the apartment by a police raid on the evening of April 3rd. When the police started to assault the premises, they set off explosives, killing themselves and one of the policemen in the blast. Over the next few days, 22 people were detained in connection with the attacks. It is believed that others managed to escape. Investigators later established that the explosives used in the Leganés apartment were of the same type as those used on March 11th and in the thwarted bombing of the AVE line.

It is worthy of note that Riay Tatory Bakry, President of the Union of Muslim Communities in Spain, stated on April 1st 2004 that his organisation has no plans to publicly urge mosques to step up their battle against terrorism.

Spain's elections to both houses of parliament, the crucial Congress of Deputies and the Senate, took place of March 14th and justified the outgoing government's fears.

The Congress of Deputies after the 2004 Election

Registered Voters	33,475,376					
Votes Cast	25,846,620	Change		%	77.21	(+8.5%)
Party	Votes	Change	%	Change	Seats	Change
<u>Socialist Party (PSOE)</u>	10,909,687	+3,080,477	42.64	+8.48	164	+39
<u>People's Party (PP)</u>	9,630,512	-599,833	37.64	-6.88	148	-35
<u>United Left (IU)</u>	1,269,532	+15,673	4.96	-1.00	5	-4
<u>Convergence and Unity (CiU)</u>	829,046	-135,944	3.22	-0.95	10	-5
<u>Republican</u>	649,999	+456,370	2.54	+1.70	8	+7

<u>Left of Catalonia</u> (ERC)						
<u>Basque Nationalists</u> (EAJ-PNV)	417,154	+55,338	1.63	+0.10	7	0
<u>Canary Islands Coalition</u> (CC)	221,034	-22,455	0.86	-0.21	3	-1
<u>Galician Nationalist Bloc</u> (BNG)	205,613	-97,113	0.80		3	-1

At stake were all 350 seats in the Congress of Deputies and 208 Senate seats. The ruling Popular Party (PP) had 183 seats in the Lower House, an absolute majority. Now its vote decreased by 6.9% and it lost 35 seats. The main opposition, the Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) led by José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, which previously had only 125 seats, increased its vote by 8.5% gaining 39 seats. Its 164 seats fell short of a majority, but this was provided by two minor left-wing parties, Republican Left of Catalonia (8 seats) and the communist United Left (5 seats), which immediately announced their intention to support Zapatero.

In addition, the Andalusian Party (PA) lost its sole seat, but three other regional parties, Aragonese Union (CHA), Basque Solidarity (EA) and Navarre Yes (NB) gained one seat each.

In the Senate the PP won 102 seats to the PSOE's 81, a better result than in the lower house. Even so, this was a 28-seat gain for the PSOE and a 25-seat loss for the PP. In Catalonia, a combined Socialist-Republican Left ticket won 12 Senate seats, and the Basque Nationalists won six.

Señor Zapatero was as good as his word and withdrew the Spanish contingent from Iraq with the least possible delay. This demonstration of Spanish cowardice was an enormous boost to Moslem terrorism the world over. It emphasised the message that terror could achieve important political gains in the Western world. Among other things, it increased the popular pressure on British Prime Minister Tony Blair to withdraw the British contingent too. Blair has been resisting this pressure, but

occasionally tries to relieve it by asking President Bush for a more pro-Palestinian policy that could only encourage terrorism further.