

“Calculated Plan Long in the Making”: The Toppling and Assassination of Yasser Arafat

Introduction by Michel Chossudovsky

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This article by the late Tanya Rheinart, Professor at Tel Aviv University was first published by Global Research on 22 December 2001.

It outlines in no uncertain terms the project of the government of Israel to destroy the Palestinian Authority and get rid of its leaders including Yasser Arafat, who was assassinated on an order issued by the Israeli Cabinet in 2003.

“We will choose the right way and the right time to kill Arafat.”

In September 2003, Israel’s government passed a law to get rid of Arafat. Israel’s cabinet for political security affairs declared it “a decision to remove Arafat as an obstacle to peace.”



As outlined in Reinhart’s 2001 article, the assassination of Yasser Arafat was long in the making. It was part of a broader military and intelligence agenda to destroy the Palestinian Authority.

What recent news reports fail to mention is that the extra-judicial assassination had not only been ordered by the Israeli cabinet in 2003, **it was subsequently approved by the US which vetoed a United Nations Security Resolution condemning the 2003 Israeli Cabinet decision to “get rid of Arafat”.**

This important article by Tanya Reinhart provides the historical background pertaining to the 2004 assassination of Arafat which had been ordered by the Israeli Cabinet.

Evil Unleashed: Israel's move to destroy the Palestinian Authority is a calculated plan, long in the making

by Professor Tanya Reinhart

December 2001

In mainstream political discourse, Israel's recent atrocities are described as 'retaliatory acts' - answering the last wave of terror attacks on Israeli civilians. But in fact, this 'retaliation' had been carefully prepared long before.

Already in October 2000, at the outset of the Palestinian uprising, military circles were ready with detailed operative plans to topple Arafat and the Palestinian Authority. This was before the Palestinian terror attacks started. (The first attack on Israeli civilians was on November 3, 2000, in a market in Jerusalem). A document prepared by the security services, at the request of then PM Barak, stated on October 15, 2000 that "Arafat, the person, is a severe threat to the security of the state [of Israel] and the damage which will result from his disappearance is less than the damage caused by his existence". (Details of the document were published in Ma'ariv, July 6, 2001.) The operative plan, known as 'Fields of Thorns' had been prepared back in 1996, and was then updated during the Intifada. (Amir Oren, Ha'aretz, Nov. 23, 2001). The plan includes everything that Israel has been executing lately, and more.(1)

The political echelon for its part (Barak's circles), worked on preparing public opinion to the toppling of Arafat. On November 20, 2000, Nahman Shai, then public-affairs coordinator of the Barak Government, released in a meeting with the press, a 60 page document titled "Palestinian Authority non-compliance...A record of bad faith and misconduct", The document, informally referred to as the "White Book", was prepared by Barak's aid, Danny Yatom.(2) According to the "White Book", Arafat's present crime - "orchestrating the Intifada", is just the last in a long chain of proofs that he has never deserted the "option of violence and 'struggle'". "As early as Arafat's own speech on the White House lawn, on September 13, 1993, there were indications that for him, the D.O.P. [declaration of principles] did not necessarily signify an end to the conflict. He did not, at any point, relinquish his uniform, symbolic of his status as a revolutionary commander" (Section 2). This uniform, incidentally, is the only 'indication' that the report cites, of Arafat's hidden intentions, on that occasion.

A large section of the document is devoted to establishing Arafat's "ambivalence and compliance" regarding terror. "In March 1997 there was once again more than a hint of a 'Green Light' from Arafat to the Hamas, prior to the bombing in Tel Aviv... This is implicit in the statement made by a Hamas-affiliated member of Arafat's Cabinet, Imad Faluji, to an American paper (Miami Herald, April 5, 1997)." No further hints are provided regarding how this links Arafat to that bombing, but this is the "green light to terror" theme which the Military Intelligence (Ama"n) has been promoting since 1997, when its anti-Oslo line was consolidated. This theme was since repeated again and again by military circles, and eventually became the mantra of Israeli propaganda - Arafat is still a terrorist and is personally responsible for the acts of all groups, from Hamas and the Islamic Jihad to Hizbollah.

The 'Foreign Report' (Jane's information) of July 12, 2001 disclosed that the Israeli army (under Sharon's government) has updated its plans for an "all-out assault to smash the Palestinian authority, force out leader Yasser Arafat and kill or detain its army". The blueprint, titled "The Destruction of the Palestinian Authority and Disarmament of All Armed Forces", was presented to the Israeli government by chief of staff Shaul Mofaz, on July 8. The assault would be launched, at the government's discretion, after a big suicide bomb attack in Israel, causing widespread deaths and injuries, citing the bloodshed as justification.

Many in Israel suspect that the assassination of the Hamas terrorist Mahmoud Abu Hanoud, just when the Hamas was respecting for two months its agreement with Arafat not to attack inside Israel, was designed to create the appropriate 'bloodshed justification', at the eve of Sharon's visit to the US. (Alex Fishman - senior security correspondent of 'Yediot' - noted that "whoever decided upon the liquidation of Abu Hanoud knew in advance that would be the price. The subject was extensively discussed both by Israel's military echelon and its political one, before it was decided to carry out the liquidation" (Yediot Aharonot, Nov. 25, 2001)).

Israel's moves to destroy the PA, thus, cannot be viewed as a spontaneous 'act of retaliation'. It is a calculated plan, long in the making. The execution requires, first, weakening the resistance of the Palestinians, which Israel has been doing systematically since October 2000, through killing, bombarding of infrastructure, imprisoning people in their hometowns, and bringing them close to starvation. All this, while waiting for the international conditions to 'ripen' for the more 'advanced' steps of the plan.

Now the conditions seem to have 'ripened'. In the power-drunk political atmosphere in the US, anything goes. If at first it seemed that the US will try to keep the Arab world on its side by some tokens of persuasion, as it did during the Gulf war, it is now clear that they couldn't care less. US policy is no longer based on building coalitions or investing in persuasion, but on sheer force. The smashing 'victory' in Afghanistan has sent a clear message to the Third-World that nothing can stop the US from targeting any nation for annihilation. They seem to believe that the most sophisticated weapons of the twenty-first century, combined with total absence of any considerations of moral principles, international law, or public opinion, can sustain them as the sole rulers of the world forever. From now on, fear should be the sufficient condition for obedience.

The US hawks, who push to expand the war to Iraq and further, view Israel as an asset - There are few regimes in the world like Israel, so eager to risk the life of their citizens for some new regional war. As Prof. Alain Joxe, head of the French CIRPES (peace and strategic studies) has put it in Le Monde, "the American leadership is presently shaped by dangerous right wing Southern extremists, who seek to use Israel as an offensive tool to destabilize the whole Middle East area" (December 17, 2001). The same hawks are also talking about expanding the future war zone to targets on Israel's agenda, like Hizbollah and Syria.

Under these circumstances, Sharon got his green light in Washington. As the Israeli media keeps raving, "Bush is fed up with this character [Arafat]", "Powell said that Arafat must stop with his lies" (Barnea and Schiffer, 'Yediot', December 7, 2001). As Arafat hides in his Bunker, Israeli F-16 bombers plough the sky, and Israel's brutality is generating, every day, new desperate human bombs, the US, accompanied for a while by the European union, keep urging Arafat to "act".

But what is the rationale behind Israel's systematic drive to eliminate the Palestinian Authority and undo the Oslo arrangements? It certainly cannot be based on 'disappointment' with Arafat's performance, as is commonly claimed. The fact of the matter is that from the perspective of Israel's interests in maintaining the occupation, Arafat did fulfill Israel's expectations all these last years.

As far as Israeli security goes, there is nothing further from the truth than the fake accusations in the "White Book", or subsequent Israeli propaganda. To take just one example, in 1997 - the year mentioned in the "White Book" as an instance of Arafat's "green light to terror" - a 'security agreement' was signed between Israel and the Palestinian authority, under the auspices of the head of the Tel Aviv station of the CIA, Stan Muskovitz. The agreement commits the PA to take active care of the security of Israel - to fight "the terrorists, the terrorist base, and the environmental conditions leading to support of terror" in cooperation with Israel, including "mutual exchange of information, ideas, and military cooperation" (clause 1). [Translated from the Hebrew text, Ha'aretz December 12, 1997]. Arafat's security services carried out this job faithfully, with assassinations of Hamas terrorists (disguised as 'accidents'), and arrests of Hamas political leaders.(3)

Ample information was published in the Israeli media regarding these activities, and 'security sources' were full of praises for Arafat's achievements. E.g. Ami Ayalon, then head of the Israeli secret service (Shab"ak), announced, in the government meeting on April 5, 1998 that "Arafat is doing his job - he is fighting terror and puts all his weight against the Hamas" (Ha'aretz, April 6, 1998). The rate of success of the Israeli security services in containing terror was never higher than that of Arafat; in fact, much lower.

In left and critical circles, one can hardly find compassion for Arafat's personal fate (as opposed to the tragedy of the Palestinian people). As David Hirst writes in The Guardian, when Arafat returned to the occupied territories, in 1994,

"he came as collaborator as much as liberator. For the Israelis, security - theirs, not the Palestinians' - was the be-all and end-all of Oslo. His job was to supply it on their behalf. But he could only sustain the collaborator's role if he won the political quid pro quo which, through a series of 'interim agreements' leading to 'final status', was supposedly to come his way. He never could. . . [Along the road], he acquiesced in accumulating concessions that only widened the gulf between what he was actually achieving and what he assured his people he would achieve, by this method, in the end. He was Mr. Palestine still, with a charisma and historical legitimacy all his own. But he was proving to be grievously wanting in that other great and complementary task, building his state-in-the-making. Economic misery, corruption, abuse of human rights, the creation of a vast apparatus of repression - all these flowed, wholly or in part, from the Authority over which he presided." (Hirst, "Arafat's last stand?" The Guardian, December 14, 2001).

But from the perspective of the Israeli occupation, all this means that the Oslo plan was, essentially, successful. Arafat did manage, through harsh means of oppression, to contain the frustration of his people, and guarantee the safety of the settlers, as Israel continued undisturbed to build new settlements and appropriate more Palestinian land. The oppressive machinery, the various security forces of Arafat, were formed and trained in collaboration with Israel. Much energy and resources were put into building this complex Oslo apparatus. It is often admitted that the Israeli security forces cannot manage to prevent terror any better than Arafat can. Why, then, was the military and political echelon so determined to

destroy all this already in October 2000, even before the terror waves started? Answering this requires some look at the history.

Right from the start of the 'Oslo process', in September 1993, two conceptions were competing in the Israeli political and military system. The one, led by Yosi Beilin, was striving to implement some version of the Alon plan, which the Labor party has been advocating for years. The original plan consisted of annexation of about 35% of the territories to Israel, and either Jordanian-rule, or some form of self-rule for the rest – the land on which the Palestinians actually live. In the eyes of its proponents, this plan represented a necessary compromise, compared to the alternatives of either giving up the territories altogether, or eternal blood-shed (as we witness today). It appeared that Rabin was willing to follow this line, at least at the start, and that in return for Arafat's commitment to control the frustration of his people and guarantee the security of Israel, he would allow the PA to run the enclaves in which the Palestinians still reside, in some form of self-rule, which may even be called a Palestinian 'state'.

But the other pole objected even to that much. This was mostly visible in military circles, whose most vocal spokesman in the early years of Oslo was then Chief of Staff, Ehud Barak. Another center of opposition was, of course, Sharon and the extreme right-wing, who were against the Oslo process from the start. This affinity between the military circles and Sharon is hardly surprising. Sharon – the last of the leaders of the '1948 generation', was a legendary figure in the army, and many of the generals were his disciples, like Barak. As Amir Oren wrote, "Barak's deep and abiding admiration for Ariel Sharon's military insights is another indication of his views; Barak and Sharon both belong to a line of political generals that started with Moshe Dayan" (Ha'aretz, January 8, 1999).

This breed of generals was raised on the myth of redemption of the land. A glimpse into this worldview is offered in Sharon's interview with Ari Shavit (Ha'aretz, weekend supplement, April 13, 2001). Everything is entangled into one romantic framework: the fields, the blossom of the orchards, the plough and the wars. The heart of this ideology is the sanctity of the land. In a 1976 interview, Moshe Dayan, who was the defense minister in 1967, explained what led, then, to the decision to attack Syria. In the collective Israeli consciousness of the period, Syria was conceived as a serious threat to the security of Israel, and a constant initiator of aggression towards the residents of northern Israel. But according to Dayan, this is "bull-shit" – Syria was not a threat to Israel before 67:

"Just drop it. . . I know how at least 80% of all the incidents with Syria started. We were sending a tractor to the demilitarized zone and we knew that the Syrians would shoot." According to Dayan (who at a time of the interview confessed some regrets), what led Israel to provoke Syria this way was the greediness for the land – the idea that it is possible "to grab a piece of land and keep it, until the enemy will get tired and give it to us" (Yediot Aharonot, April 27 1997)

At the eve of Oslo, the majority of the Israeli society was tired of wars. In their eyes, the fights over land and resources were over. Most Israelis believe that the 1948 Independence War, with its horrible consequences for the Palestinians, was necessary to establish a state for the Jews, haunted by the memory of the Holocaust. But now that they have a state, they long to just live normally with whatever they have. However, the ideology of the redemption of land has never died out in the army, or in the circles of the 'political generals', who switched from the army to the government. In their eyes, Sharon's alternative of fighting

the Palestinians to the bitter end and imposing new regional orders – as he tried in Lebanon in 1982 – may have failed because of the weakness of the spoiled Israeli society. But given the new war-philosophy established in Iraq, Kosovo and Afghanistan, they believe that with the massive superiority of the Israeli air force, it may still be possible to win this battle in the future.

While Sharon's party was in the opposition at the time of Oslo, Barak, as Chief of Staff, participated in the negotiations and played a crucial role in shaping the agreements, and Israel's attitude to the Palestinian Authority.

I quote from an article I wrote in February 1994, because it reflects what anybody who read carefully the Israeli media could see at the time:

“From the start, it has been possible to identify two conceptions that underlie the Oslo process. One is that this will enable to reduce the cost of the occupation, using a Palestinian patronage regime, with Arafat as the senior cop responsible for the security of Israel. The other is that the process should lead to the collapse of Arafat and the PLO. The humiliation of Arafat, and the amplification of his surrender, will gradually lead to loss of popular support. Consequently, the PLO will collapse, or enter power conflicts. Thus, the Palestinian society will lose its secular leadership and institutions. In the power driven mind of those eager to maintain the Israeli occupation, the collapse of the secular leadership is interpreted as an achievement, because it would take a long while for the Palestinian people to get organized again, and, in any case, it is easier to justify even the worst acts of oppression, when the enemy is a fanatic Muslim organization. Most likely, the conflict between the two competing conceptions is not settled yet, but at the moment, the second seems more dominant: In order to carry out the first, Arafat's status should have been strengthened, with at least some achievements that could generate support of the Palestinians, rather than Israel's policy of constant humiliation and breach of promises.”(4)

Nevertheless, the scenario of the collapse of the PA did not materialize. The Palestinian society resorted once more to their marvelous strategy of ‘zumud’ – sticking to the land and sustaining the pressure. Right from the start, the Hamas political leadership, and others, were warning that Israel is trying to push the Palestinians into a civil war, in which the nation slaughters itself. All fragments of the society cooperated to prevent this danger, and calm conflicts as soon as they were deteriorating to arms. They also managed, despite the tyranny of Arafat's rule, to build an impressive amount of institutions and infrastructure. The PA does not consist only of the corrupt rulers and the various security forces. The elected Palestinian council, which operates under endless restrictions, is still a representative political framework, some basis for democratic institutions in the future. For those whose goal is the destruction of the Palestinian identity and the eventual redemption of their land, Oslo was a failure.

In 1999, the army got back to power, through the ‘political generals’ – first Barak, and then Sharon. (They collaborated in the last elections to guarantee that no other, civil, candidate will be allowed to run.) The road opened to correct what they view as the grave mistake of Oslo. In order to get there, it was first necessary to convince the spoiled Israeli society that the Palestinians are not willing to live in peace and are threatening our mere existence. Sharon alone could not have possibly achieved that, but Barak did succeed, with his ‘generous offer’ fraud. After a year of horrible terror attacks, combined with massive propaganda and lies, Sharon and the army feel that nothing can stop them from turning to

full execution.

Why is it so urgent for them to topple Arafat? Shabtai Shavit, former head of the Security Service ('Mossad'), who is not bound by restraints posed on official sources, explains this openly: "In the thirty something years that he [Arafat] leads, he managed to reach real achievements in the political and international sphere... He got the Nobel peace prize, and in a single phone call, he can obtain a meeting with every leader in the world. There is nobody in the Palestinian gallery that can enter his shoes in this context of international status. If they [the Palestinians] will lose this gain, for us, this is a huge achievement. The Palestinian issue will get off the international agenda." (interview in Yediot's Weekend Supplement, December 7, 2001).

Their immediate goal is to get the Palestinians off the international agenda, so slaughter, starvation, forced evacuation and 'migration' can continue undisturbed, leading, possibly, to the final realization of Sharon's long standing vision, embodied in the military plans. The immediate goal of anybody concerned with the future of the world, should be to halt this process of evil unleashed. As Alain Joxe concluded his article in Le Monde:

"It is time for the Western public opinion to take over and to compel the governments to take a moral and political stand facing the foreseen disaster, namely a situation of permanent war against the Arab and Muslim people and states - the realization of the double phantasy of Bin Laden and Sharon." (December 17, 2001).

Notes

(1) For the details of this operative plan, see Anthony Cordesman, "Peace and War: Israel versus the Palestinians A second Intifada?" Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) December 2000, and its summary in Shraga Eilam, "Peace With Violence or Transfer", 'Between The Lines', December 2000.

(2) The document can be found in:

(3) For a survey on some of the PA's assassinations of Hamas terrorists, see my article "The A-Sherif affair", 'Yediot Aharonot', April 14, 1998,

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