

The Murder of Arafat

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WHILE I AM WRITING THIS, Yasser Arafat is still alive. But his life is hanging on a thread. When we visited him the last time in his bombed-out Mukata'ah compound in Ramallah, I warned him that Sharon is determined to kill him.

Everybody acquainted with Sharon knows that he never lets go. When he does not achieve his aim the first time, he tries again, and again, and again, and again. Never, ever, does he give up.

Already in besieged Beirut, at the height of the Lebanon war, Sharon was trying to put his hands on him. Dozens of agents, mostly Phalanges members, were combing the western quarters in order to catch him. He evaded them, as he has evaded dozens of assassination attempts before and after, by Abu-Nidal (who was at least partly a Mossad hireling) and others.

Now Sharon believes that he can achieve his aim. He needs only Bush's approval. Not necessarily a formal confirmation. A subtle hint will suffice. Half a word. A wink.

It will be easy to implement the decision. An incident can be put in motion: soldiers enter the office in order to capture "wanted" people, somebody opens fire, Arafat will be shot "by accident". Arafat may draw his pistol, soldiers will "have no alternative" but to return fire. A shell may hit the office "by mistake", Arafat will be buried under the rubble. After all, in war accidents happen. A lot of accidents.

Sharon never wanted to "deport" Arafat to Gaza or any other place in this world. He wants to deport him to the next world. Now this is possible.

Therefore, it is necessary to speak out bluntly and unequivocally:

MORALLY, THE murder of Arafat, the historical leader and elected president of the Palestinian people, is reprehensible. Like the murder of Rabin.

Legally, the murder of Arafat is a war crime.

Politically, it will be said about the murder of Arafat what a French statesman said about another political murder: "It is worse than a crime, it is a mistake!"

Arafat is the man who decided, 28 years ago, to start on the road to a settlement with Israel, in order to realize this way the national aspirations of the Palestinian people. At the time, that was an incredibly bold decision, and he took it long before Rabin and Peres even dreamed about Oslo. I know, because I was an eye-witness to the beginnings of the process.

Since then, Arafat has not changed by one iota the decision he took then: to seek conciliation with Israel within the framework of peace that will include an independent Palestinian state,

return to the pre-1967 border with mutually agreed adjustments, Jerusalem capital of both states, withdrawal of the settlers, suitable security arrangements, a mutually agreed solution of the refugee problem.

On this basis, peace is possible even now. Immediately. But Sharon rejects it with both his fists. He wants a Greater Israel, the extension of the settlements, and, eventually, the elimination of the Palestinian presence west of the Jordan.

The assertion of Ehud Barak that Arafat has rejected his own peace plan is a blatant lie, that has caused a historical disaster. Barak's "generous offers" were far from the sensible solution.

Now, as before, Arafat is the only person capable of signing a peace agreement and convince his people to accept and implement it. No other Palestinian leader capable of doing so is to be seen on the horizon. Leadership of the Palestinian people will not pass into the hands of the "moderates", who will look like collaborators and accomplices to the murder, but into the hands of the extremists, fanatics thirsting for revenge.

The murder of Arafat is the murder of all chances for peace.

That is a crime against the Israeli people. It will condemn us to making war for decades, perhaps for generations to come, perhaps forever. The moral, social and economic decline that we are experiencing now everywhere in Israel will drag Israel down to new depths and to the emigration of many.

The dead Arafat will become a legend of heroism to his people and a new Che Guevara to the world. His mistakes will be forgotten. For future generations of Palestinians, he will become a role model. Hundreds of millions of Arabs and Muslims, from Morocco to Indonesia, will compare their own leaders to the dead Arafat, and the comparison will be fatal.

In the eyes of these hundreds of millions, Israel and Jews will become a synonym of betrayal, killing and lying. The poisonous plant of anti-Semitism will bloom as never before. Already we are tasting a small sample of this

If this disaster happens, all the government will share the blame. Not one minister will be acquitted. Neither Ben-Eliezer, nor Peres, nor any of their colleagues. Nor the army officers who cooperated and even pushed the political leadership. Nor the members of the Knesset, whether belonging to the coalition or the opposition, who kept quiet during the recent months. Nor the correspondents and commentators, who turned themselves into government and army spokesmen. Nor the professors and intellectuals, who saw and were silent. All of them will bear the responsibility.

This is the last minute to get up and shout: NO!