

Yasser Arafat: Leadership, Legacy, and the Quest for Peace in the Middle East

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Abstract: In this sweeping and dramatic work, Beverly Milton-Edwards and Stephen Farrell astutely assess the rise of Yasser Arafat, his long struggle as leader of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, and the legacy of the man who dominated the politics of the Middle East for almost five decades. We investigate the complexities and inconsistencies of Arafat's rule from his roots as a rebel icon through his troublesome commitment to the Oslo peace arrangement and on to a definitive weakness investigation of his political logic, strategic attempts, and enduring effect on Palestinian governmental issues. The innovative frame that the study uses to interpret the narrative can be summed up by considering Arafat in terms of more than his political failures but also as an image of hope in the struggle of the Palestinian nation. It does this by tapping into academic research and historical knowledge. Recalling Arafat's leadership and legacy helps to make sense of the continuing agonizing struggle for peace, justice and self-determination in the Middle East.

Keywords: Yasser Arafat, Leadership, Legacy, the Middle East

INTRODUCTION

Yasser Arafat, a central figure in Palestinian history, stood atop the scene in the struggle for statehood. He led the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and his fame would only have been improved if Israel had assassinated him in another of its targeted hits. Also worried is that Arafat - a historic figure in Palestinian history for his role in building the PLO and leading the Palestinian statehood - will never be exhumed again, he said. A born Cairene (1929), Arafat was the charismatic leader of convenience whose life was spent campaigning for the rights and autonomy of the Palestinian people (Gowers, 2008). As the founder and long-time chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Arafat played a significant role in sparking Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation and oppression (Sayigh, 1997). For decades of wars and uprisings, his leadership was synonymous with the

Palestinian national movement and the fight to end a Jewish state.

Arafat's determination to obtain a Palestinian state alongside the international system and commitment to the Palestinian cause distinguished his leadership style (Aburish pg. He converted the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) from a marginal resistance grouping into a recognized political instrument reflecting the Palestinian quest for autonomy and statehood (Rubenberg, 2003). Arafat Adapted In fact, it was this ability of Arafat to adapt to the political dynamics that forged the unique features of his leadership and helped in sustaining the unity and coherence of the Palestinian movement both internally and externally, regardless of the regional shifts and external threats (Sayigh, 2007). Internationally, his uncompromising loyalty in pursuit of Palestinian rights also earned criticisms as it did accolades. For instance, Arafat was revered as a

Palestinian revolutionary who embodied the will and resistance to the Palestinian people's injustice in his leadership role (Said, 1999). His iconic image in a keffiyeh, such as the one in the photo below, became the embodiment of the Palestinian struggle for liberation and dignity (Tamari, 2010) and resonated with supporters everywhere. Arafat was consistent in his defense of Palestinian rights, gaining support from Arab states, nonaligned countries and international public opinion in the face of international isolation and efforts to eliminate his leadership (Khalidi, 2007). His tireless quixotic trademark crusade for the Palestinian question globalized and humanitarianised that cause.

Ultimately, Yasser Arafat's bourbon's status as Prime Minister and his influence in the Palestinian Liberation Movement is inextricably bound to his place in Palestinian history. As a symbol of armed Palestinian resistance and the Palestinian national dream to establish a state, Arafat has an indelible imprint on the struggle for justice and self-determination, now in its seventh decade in the Middle East. Arafat's legacy has inspired generations of Palestinians to his goal as a symbol of resistance by saying, "While his work remains incomplete, leading to liberty of the Jewish, he is embalmed and buried to such an age-long fight for imperialists at the 2004 Islamic Center of Libya peninsula in the need to get their peace and humiliation when they demanded" (Rabinovich, 2005).

EARLY LIFE AND BACKGROUND

His youth and upbringing largely influenced Yasser Arafat's activism and political views. Born in Cairo, Egypt, on 24 August 1929 (Gowers, Arafat grew up in Cairo, where his family had moved. His mother, Zahwa Abul Saud, inherited from one of Jerusalem's well-known families, and his father, Abdel Raouf al-Qudwa al-Husseini, a merchant from Palestine, has arrived from Gaza in Cairo (Aburish, 1998). With his family having experienced the dispersion of Palestinian refugees and their long battle, Arafat grew up to have a profound and profound belief in the Palestinian nation.

It was the locale where Arafat's political and intellectual maturity was shaped. During his primary and secondary education in Cairo, he was an excellent student interested in politics and current events (Sayigh, 1997). Throughout his early life, Arafat developed a growing sensitivity to the injustices suffered by the Palestinian people—foremost under Israeli occupation but additionally under the rule of the British mandate. Arafat was planted at an early age with the seeds of nationalism and political activism, eventually providing the foundation for his dedication to the Palestinian cause.

He was raised in the wave of Arab nationalism that roared across the Middle East after the Second World War (Rubenberg, 2003). Leaders like Gamel Abdul-Naseer of Egypt inspired him, who asked the Arab world to unify and eliminate colonial hegemony (Said, 1999). All of these things made Arafat determined to be the guardian of the rights of the Palestinian people by earning their reputation among their identifiers and experiences of persecution and displacement. He already had come to hold deeply that the Palestinian national cause was a genuine and authentic one worthy of all Palestinians to battle for autonomy when he registered to study at King Fuad I University (now Cairo College) (Khalidi, 2007).

Arafat's early activity in student movements served to cement his political beliefs. It taught him a few scratches of the trade necessary for the revolutionary scene he was about to enter. At university, Arafat had been an engineering student at Cairo University and had joined the Palestinian Student Union. This radical body became the cradle of Palestinian politics because it was virtually the only way Palestinians could express themselves collectively without attracting retribution or arousing suspicions of the familiar dilemma of students under occupation and one that turned higher education itself into an arena of struggle. He was, above all, a man of student politics, leading the BDS (Boycott, Divestments and Sanctions) movement of his time, taking out distant student insurance (Sayigh, 2007). These early experiences of grassroots activism and resistance would shape a lifelong commitment to the Palestinian cause and eventual leadership of the Palestinian Liberation Movement for Arafat.

In conclusion, Yasser Arafat was exposed to such a politically segregated life in general because of his primary education, his family background, and the environment he lived in, all of which helped him take on a leadership role and influenced his political views. Arafat had felt the touch of both the petty thug and the power-hungry clique. This man was shaped as much by the experience of his early years in Cairo as by the increasingly brutal currents of Arab nationalism that swirled around him. These experiences helped form him and made him ready to lead the Palestinian struggle and doggedly pursue justice and Palestinian liberation.

FORMATION OF THE PLO

The PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization), reacting to the horrible living conditions faced by the people of Palestine after the Nakba in 1948, or "catastrophe", which led to the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians and the birth of the new state of Israel (Hroub, 2000). Rosenberg (2003) argues that after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, Palestinian

refugees were dispossessed and denied their rights, resulting in statelessness and having their land appropriated by the Israeli army. As a result of the preceding, Palestinian factions and leaders united to establish the PLO in 1964, differing in structure and goals but agreeing on the necessity for a sole platform to unite the Palestinians worldwide (Sayigh, 1997). The PLO was a central organizer of the Palestinian's struggle for self-determination, their homeland, and their representative.

One of the principal founders and operatives of the PLO was Yasser Arafat, and he became one of the leaders and, to some extent, the face of the organization (Gowers, 2008). As a young activist, Arafat recognized the significant requirements of having a sole Palestinian speaker on the international stage, a goal the co-founder of the Fatah movement identified (Sayigh, 2007). Arafat and other Palestinian leaders formally created the PLO as the umbrella group for various Palestinian political factions and resistance organizations by calling the Palestine National Congress in Jerusalem in 1964 (Aburish, 1998). He could mobilize PLO support through his charisma, leadership qualities, and dedication to the Palestinian cause as a whole (not just to the occupied territories).

Begun as a fragmented assembly of different factions, the PLO eventually emerged as a highly integrated and cohesive political organization of great power, entirely acting under the direction of Arafat (Hroub, 2004). Because of his diplomatic skills and strategic vision, the PLO gained recognition as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people by Arab states, non-aligned countries and international organizations (Khalidi, 2007). Arafat also laboured "to keep the Palestinian cause on the map, in the face of hostile political conditions, and to pursue the struggle for a state and Palestinian rights through diplomacy and advocacy" and "done almost nothing else" (Sayigh, 2007). His crucial position as the PLO leader during decades of Arab-Israeli conflicts and the Palestinian public rise elevated him to the status of a legendary figure in Palestinian and Middle Eastern histories.

Finally, the creation of the PLO was a historic milestone for the Palestinian people. It provided the people with the wherewithal to defend their rights and work to achieve statehood and self-determination. Yasser Arafat marshaled international support for Palestinian rights and promoted the Palestinian struggle, creating the PLO. With the PLO, he became a symbol of the Palestinian struggle and the essence of Palestinian hopes for justice and freedom.

POLITICAL IDEOLOGY AND STRATEGIES

Yasser Arafat's political thought centred on Palestinian political nationalism, resistance and the need for a Palestinian state. Arafat arguably traded his life for the notion that Palestine would gain nationhood with Jerusalem as the capital of its state (Aburish, 1998). Arafat's logic was that people who had endured exile, dispossession and occupation for decades had the right to self-determination. Arafat insisted that the Palestinians had the right to employ all available means to resist Israel's occupation and subjugation, not excluding armed struggle, diplomacy or popular mobilization for their cause (Rubenberg, 2003). His political philosophy was built around bringing the Palestinians, despite geographical and ideological divides-around common goals, statehood, and liberation.

Arafat and the PLO employed several strategies in their struggle to secure Palestinian rights, and they pursued the Palestinian cause on numerous levels. Among the strategies was the armed struggle expressed by Fatah, the militant arm of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), that Arafat had helped establish in the late 1950s (Sayigh, 1997). The PLO was sought using guerrilla warfare and sporadic raids on military and civilian targets to challenge Israeli rule and lay claim to the land (Sayigh, 2007). Arafat believed that, in the face of power, an over-imposing military power, a power residing from the state's inherent violence, an equal power from the state-run war machine was legitimate and necessary.

Moreover, in their efforts to find international partners to support their struggle, Arafat and the PLO combined armed resistance with diplomatic overtures to move the Palestinian case for statehood into the diplomatic arena (Khalidi, 2007). To increase the volume and strength of the Palestinian rhetoric internationally, Arafat adhered to a policy of dialogue with the world and consolidating his relationships with states and forces that supported him (Hroub, 2004). Arafat sought to secure recognition of Palestinian rights under international law and establish a diplomatic groundwork for the eventual recognition of Palestinian statehood by creating measures including the 1988 Palestinian Declaration of Independence and his involvement in peace talks (Said, 1999).

They were also aware of the necessity for popular mobilization in order to generate Palestinian support and demonstrate opposition to Israeli occupation (Tamari, 2010). The PLO tried to mobilize Palestinian society for political aims using mass marches, civil disobedience and cultural and educational institutions (Hroub, 2000, p. 127). (Aburish, 1998). Arafat's

philosophy of leadership, characterized at its core by the pragmatically oriented notion that the only ones who can help the Palestinians are the Palestinians themselves, took a route in which the empowerment and struggle against oppression emphasizes the participatory aspect of leadership at the grassroots level.

In sum, Palestinian nationalism, resistance, and statehood were central to Yasser Arafat's political philosophy, reflecting his hard-core commitment to the Palestinian cause. Arafat would combine tactics of armed conflict, diplomacy and grassroots organizing through the PLO in the struggle for Palestinian liberation and rights. Arafat Astynen waited unwaveringly, believing that the Palestinian people had the right to self-determination for their homeland and human dignity despite countless difficulties and bitterness.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Yasser Arafat also met with international bodies and world leaders to spur UN support for the Palestinian cause and the overall endeavour of a sovereign state of Palestine. Arafat's Diplomacy to Secure Palestinian Rights Arafat attempted to gain international support for Palestinian rights through intensive diplomatic efforts spanning heads of state ambassadors and representatives of international organizations (Nasser (2017, p. 78). He maintained diplomatic relationships with US presidents, European leaders and Arab and Muslim-majority countries to build alliances and support the Palestinian cause (Kemp, 2017). In order to make the continued suffering of the Palestinians evident to the international community, Arafat pursued diplomacy with high risks in these talks and the shuttle and public diplomacy initiatives (Hass, 2017).

Arafat's diplomatic efforts to win international sympathy for the Palestinian cause experienced a very hostile environment. It eventuated from an immediate lack of consensus that emerging global powers and local players should have reached a mechanism to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian woe (Chomsky, 2015). Arafat had long been controversial with Western governments, especially the United States and Israel, which both classified him and the PLO he led as terrorist groups and resisted efforts to reflect Palestinian demands for statehood (Beinin, 2018). Arafat was resisted by conservative Arab regimes that distrusted his revolutionary program and feared the destabilizing potential of Palestinian nationalism on regional stability (Hroub, 2006). The difficulties that these geopolitical circumstances caused to Arafat's diplomatic effort not only made the road to a negotiated settlement tougher but also the

possibility that decent pushers would always continue to draw insight from the same.

Despite these challenges, Arafat and the Palestinian leadership persisted in their diplomatic efforts to achieve a just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. One of their most significant diplomatic initiatives was the 1993 Oslo Accords, a milestone in Israeli-Palestinian relations (Quandt, 2013). Arafat engaged in the Oslo peace process, seeking to unequivocally cooperate towards a peaceful time based on the principles of land in return for peace, common recognition, and the development of a Palestinian state adjacent to Israel (Hiltermann, 2018). For all its successes, however, the Oslo process fell apart because of mutual mistrust, inadequate follow-up and a steady decline in violence, boding ill for the bleak impediments that must be transcended with a comprehensive peace deal (Sontag, 2000). The tension between resistance and accommodation in the struggle for Palestinian rights and statehood was underscored when Arafat sought to find his way through the Oslo process with its diplomatic minefield (Tessler, To this day, Yasser Arafat's efforts at reaching out through diplomacy, negotiation and advocacy to win backing for the Palestinian cause with global leaders and international bodies continue to be the de facto summation of his forays in such a realm. Despite numerous predicaments and obstructions, such as opposition from other quarters and the intricacies of regional politics, Arafat continued to address the Palestinian national question and represent his people's will and determination to enhance their international rights and aspirations. His efforts were unsuccessful, and he faced many disappointments, but his diplomacy laid some groundwork for future peace-making and negotiations.

THE OSLO ACCORDS AND LATER YEARS

Yasser Arafat's participation in the Oslo peace process was another critical phase in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but it was also to gain Palestinian statehood. The Palestinian approach was strategically transformed in the arrest of the Oslo Accords, through which Arafat agreed to negotiate with Israel and abandoned the armed resistance to resort to the peaceful method of the two-state solution (Gelvin, 2005).

The Oslo process was inspired by the core principles of land for peace and mutual recognition. It provided a unique opportunity to end an endless violent chapter and create a vision of an independent Palestinian state living in peace and security next to Israel (Hiltermann, 2018). Though emulent and distrusted in the walls of the Palestinian parties, Arafat resolved to make a bargain and come to peace in the Oslo negotiations (Lustick, 2017). Nonetheless, the Oslo peace process failed to deliver a

final and durable peace settlement, leaving the Palestinians disappointed and disenchanted (Farsakh, 2005). Numerous Palestinians charged Arafat with granting too many concessions without reaping any tangible benefits in return (Said, 2014), making his leadership during the Oslo years controversial and critiqued.

With the decline in Arafat's leadership, the Oslo process saw many difficulties and internal schisms within the Palestinian movement (Tamari, 2015). Both the peace process and Arafat's authority/credibility suffered when peace negotiations collapsed, the violence that enveloped the Second Intifada ensued, and Israeli settlements in the occupied territories continued to grow (Tessler, 2009). History, however, suggests that Arafat's authoritarian and opaque manner of leadership served to aggravate tensions within mainstream Palestinian society and nurture allegations of corruption and incompetence (Rabinovich, 2005). Nevertheless, Arafat remained a famous nationalist and a Palestinian icon of survival and opposition and, therefore, enjoyed significant support from the Palestinians (Sayigh, 2007).

Alternative readings of Arafat's role in Palestinian history have recently generated much controversy and debate about his legacy and leadership in his last years (Podeh, 2016). Critics of Arafat point to his controversial decisions, missed opportunities, and failed strategies. At the same time, his supporters viewed him as a visionary leader who made great strides towards international recognition and fought for the rights of the Palestinian people (Nasser, 2017). The controversial legacy of the Arafat Israeli-Palestinian conflict has continued to manifest similarly in the contentious and complex legacy of Arafat (Hroub, 2006).

To sum up, although born a Palestinian, Yasser's leadership throughout the last decade and a half of his life and his ultimate Madrid and Oslo efforts had a significant consequence on Palestine's independence fight. While the Oslo Accords represented an unprecedented effort to forge an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement by diplomatic and negotiating means, in the end, the accords fell far short of their potential. His legacy is characterized by praise - and blame - for his leadership style, reflecting the depth of his impact on the past, present, and uncertain future of Palestinian history and the fight for liberation and self-determination.

LEGACY AND IMPACT

For Palestinian history and the broader Middle East, Yasser Arafat was both a nationalist leader, revolutionary, and symbol of Palestinian resistance, and his legacy is as multi-

faceted as his roles. Through his leadership of the PLO and his unwavering commitment to the Palestinian cause, Arafat acquired international respect, recognition, and legendary status among Palestinians (Anderson, 2003). His legacy is inextricably linked with all the crucial epochs of Palestinian history: the Oslo Accords signature, the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, and Arafat's relentless fight for Palestinian rights and statehood (Hroub, 2006). Arafat became a figurehead for all Palestinian perseverance and resilience in the struggle against adversity, albeit initially to much criticism and on the other side of much controversy (Nasser, 2017, p. 1048).

In the evolution of Palestinian politics, discussions about statehood, resistance, and national identity still bear the mark of Arafat's beliefs and ideals. For most Palestinians, Arafat's commitment to the Palestinian right to self-determination and emphasis on Jerusalem as the heart of the Palestinian issue acts as an ideal that should never be a compromise (Said, 2014). In light of the ongoing internal turmoil and political balkanization, Arafat's focus on Palestinian unity and brotherhood—beyond factional divisions—remains relevant (Lustick, 2017). What is more, the current struggle to revive peace processes that can lead to a just and lasting solution is still anchored in this Arafatian commitment to a negotiated settlement by both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on international law and mutual recognition (Quandt, 2013). Arafat remains a marquee name in the Arab and Muslim world, and his influence extends beyond Palestinian politics to the broader Arab landscape. For decades, Arafat had become impassioned and gained considerable sympathy and backing in the Arab world for his championing of the Palestinian reaction and his judicious opposition to the Israeli occupation (Hiltermann, 2018). Over time, these struggles became an almost universal cause célèbre, waged internationally and with the steadfast support of solidarity movements, non-aligned countries, and grassroots activists worldwide (Roy, 2012). In the Middle East and elsewhere, actions for social justice and liberation are still inspired by Arafat as an icon of persistence and defiance (Segev, 2000).

In the end, Yasser Arafat's lasting mark on the Palestinian struggle for independence, dignity, and statehood is a testament to his legacy in the annals of Palestinian history and the wider Middle East region. Arafat's legacy and ideals shape Palestinian politics and are the bedrock for an unending struggle for justice and self-determination. Despite his divisive legacy, Arafat's services to the Palestinian cause are considered among the most important in the collective memory of Palestinians and beyond, an iconic position of resistance.

CONCLUSION

The commitment of Yasser Arafat to the Palestinian cause and his indefatigable efforts to ensure the rights and the statehood of the Palestinian people are the features of his leadership and his legacy. He was a legendary figure in Palestinian history (Hroub, 2006, p. 129), the founding figure and long-serving chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), helping the Palestinians rise against Israeli oppression and occupation. Arafat governed the Palestinian movement through his resilience, pragmatism, and strong nationalist identity, which allowed him to overcome internal and external challenges and maintain the unity of the Palestinian movement (Tamari, 2015). Critics and controversy aside, Arafat's legacy is a paragon of Palestinian resilience and struggle in adversity (Nasser, 2017). Arafat was resilient, pragmatic, and played an instrumental role in grounding the movement on a solid national basis (Tamari, 2015), knowing how to negotiate and navigate through regional and international politics thus both within and without managed, however imperiously, to maintain and preserve the unity of the movement, warding off separatist and factional strains. Despite the criticism and controversy, Arafat remains a symbol of Palestinian endurance and steadfastness at a time when they are required to endure a great deal for the cause they cherish (Nasser, 2017).

However, Arafat's importance in the Palestinian cause and Middle East peace efforts is undeniable. Arafat's lead of the PLO was how the Palestinian struggle was brought to the world's attention, and he won the backing of Arab states, non-aligned countries, and grassroots movements everywhere (Roy, 2012). Arafat's backing of the Palestinian right of appeal and statehood struck a chord in the hearts of people from Moscow

to New York; it helped focus world attention on the plight of the Palestinian people and generated global solidarity' (Segev, 2000). Numerous obstacles and setbacks lay ahead, but through his diplomacy, he inspired the world to pay attention to the Palestinian struggle while setting the stage for a future era of Arab-Israeli peace-building and diplomatic engagements (Quandt, 2013).

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is highly complex and rife with contradictions, and it can be seen as Arafat's legacy that these particular challenges remain in place in order to achieve a just, lasting peace in the region. While Arafat was critical in placing Palestinian nationalism in the gaze of the world as a significant humanitarian issue (Lustick, 2017), his controversial decisions and actions, especially during the Oslo years, showed diplomacy to be a very obstinate process and that, ultimately, peace agreements that do not face political realities on the ground and power imbalances tend to be very unstable. The legacy of Arafat, a man who battled continuously for justice and self-rule in the Middle East, and the challenges of leadership in times of conflict came to life (Anderson, 2003).

In conclusion, Yasser Arafat, the past of Palestine and the search for Middle East harmony until the end of time influenced the inheritance and administration of Arafat. Many Palestinians and people around the globe remember Arafat as someone who fought tirelessly for the Palestinian cause and worked to secure Palestinian rights and statehood through diplomacy and negotiations. To many, he remains a figure of resistance and persistence. Arafat's contribution to the Palestinian cause is a matter of dispute and interpretation. However, his influence on the history of Palestine and the contemporary peace process demonstrates how the leadership of this embattled region is mired in complexity and justice in the struggle there.

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