

Report Part Title: Palestinian Self-Betrayal

Report Title: The Myth of Palestinian Centrality

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Lebanon or "Fatahland" were also under Palestinian control. In flagrant violation of Lebanese sovereignty, the PLO set up roadblocks, took over buildings and drove out local residents, operated extortion rackets, protected criminals fleeing from Lebanese justice, and committed countless atrocities against Lebanese civilians. Most notable was the January 1976 massacre of hundreds of residents of the Christian town of Damour, south of Beirut, and the expulsion of the remaining population.⁶²

PALESTINIAN SELF-BETRAYAL

As if the Palestinians' longtime manipulation and abuse by their supposed Arab "brothers" has not been enough, their own leaders have never had a real stake in leading them to statehood. This is both because the hopes and wishes of their constituents did not figure in their calculations, and because they have vastly profited from having their hapless constituents run around in circles for nearly a century, while milking world sympathy for the plight they brought about themselves in the first place.

In mandatory Palestine, ordinary Arabs were persecuted and murdered by their alleged betters for the crime of "selling Palestine" to the Jews. Meanwhile, these same betters were enriching themselves with impunity. The staunch pan-Arabist Awni Abdel Hadi, who vowed to fight "until Palestine is either placed under a free Arab government or becomes a graveyard for all the Jews in the country,"⁶³ facilitated the transfer of 7,500 acres to the Zionist movement. Some of his relatives, all respected political and religious figures, went a step further by selling actual plots of land. Many prominent leaders including Muin Madi, Alfred Rock, and As'ad Shuqeiri (father of Ahmad, PLO founder) also sold land. Musa Alami, who bragged to David Ben-Gurion that "he would prefer the land to remain poor and desolate even for another hundred years" if the alternative was its rapid development in collaboration with the Zionists,⁶⁴ made a handsome profit by selling 225 acres to the Jews. So, too, did numerous members of the Husseini family, the foremost Palestinian Arab clan during the mandate period, including Musa Kazim (father of Abdel Qader Husseini, the famous guerrilla leader) and Muhammad Tahir, Hajj Amin's father.⁶⁵

Hajj Amin himself had few qualms about profiting from the Jewish national revival which he sought to eradicate whenever this suited his needs. Prior to his appointment as the Jerusalem mufti, he pleaded with Jewish leaders to lobby on his behalf with (the Jewish) Herbert Samuel, the first British high commissioner for Palestine, and in 1927, he asked Gad Frumkin, the only Jewish Supreme Court justice during the mandatory era, to influence Jerusalem's Jewish community to back the Husseini candidate in the mayoral elections. He likewise employed a Jewish architect to build a luxury hotel for the Supreme Muslim Council, which he headed, while ordering his constituents to boycott Jewish labor and products.⁶⁶ Needless to say, the mufti never sought to apply to his own father his religious authorization (fatwa) to kill those who sold land to Jews.

"Arab nationalist feelings were never allowed to harm the interests of the Husseini family," wrote the prominent Jerusalem lawyer and Zionist activist Bernard (Dov) Joseph, a future minister of justice in the Israeli government.

One of [the mufti's] kinsmen, Jamil Husseini, had once engaged my services in land litigation which went as high as the Privy Council in London ... For years, one of the Mufti's close relations prospered mightily by forcing Arab small-holders to sell land, at niggardly prices, which he then resold to Jews at a handsome profit.⁶⁷

This institutionalized racketeering skyrocketed to new heights under the PLO. Just as the Palestinian leadership during the mandate had no qualms about inciting its constituents against Zionism and Jews while lining its own pockets from the fruits of Jewish development and land purchases, so too have the cynical and self-seeking PLO "revolutionaries". They have used the billions of dollars donated by the Arab oil states and the international community to lead a luxurious lifestyle in sumptuous hotels and villas, globe-trotting in grand style, acquiring properties, and making financial investments worldwide - while millions of ordinary Palestinians scrambled for a livelihood.

This process reached its peak following the September 1993 signing of the Israel-PLO Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-government

Arrangements (DOP, or Oslo I) and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. For all his rhetoric about Palestinian independence, Arafat had never been as interested in the attainment of statehood as in the violence attending its pursuit. In the late 1970s, he 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.⁶⁸ Once given control of the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza as part of the Oslo process, he made this bleak prognosis a self-fulfilling prophecy. He established a repressive and corrupt regime in the worst tradition of Arab dictatorships where the rule of the gun prevailed over the rule of law and where large sums of money donated by the international community for the benefit of the civilian Palestinian population were diverted to funding racist incitement, buying weaponry, and filling secret bank accounts. Extensive protection and racketeering networks run by PA officials proliferated while the national budget was plundered at will by PLO veterans and Arafat cronies. For example, in May 1997, the first-ever report by the PA's comptroller stated that \$325 million, out of the 1996 budget of \$800 million had been "wasted" by Palestinian ministers and agencies or embezzled by officials.⁶⁹

Arafat himself held a secret Tel Aviv bank account accessible only to him and his personal advisor Muhammad Rashid, in which he insisted that Israel deposit the tax receipts collected on imports to the Palestinian territories (rather than transfer them directly to the PA). Between 1994-2000, nearly eleven billion shekels (about US\$2.5 billion) were reportedly paid into this account, of which only a small, unspecified part reached its designated audience.⁷⁰ Small wonder that in 2004 the French authorities opened a money-laundering inquiry into suspect regular transfers into the Paris bank accounts held by Arafat's wife Suha, who resided there with their daughter. After Arafat's death Suha was reportedly promised an annual pension of \$22 million to cover her sumptuous lifestyle, paid from an alleged \$4 billion "secret fortune" managed personally by the PA president and kept in a number of bank accounts in Tel Aviv, London, and Zurich.⁷¹

Though this breathtaking corruption played an important role in Hamas's landslide electoral victory of January 2006, the PLO/PA leadership seems to have learned nothing and to have forgotten nothing. Not only

did Abbas, who succeeded Arafat as PLO chairman and PA president, blatantly ignore the results of the only (semi) democratic elections in Palestinian history - establishing an alternative government to the legally appointed Hamas government and refusing to hold new elections upon the expiry of his presidency in January 2009 - but he seems to have followed in his predecessor's kleptocratic footsteps, reportedly siphoning at least \$100 million to private accounts abroad and enriching his sons at the PA's expense.⁷² In the words of Fahmi Shabaneh, former head of the Anti-Corruption Department in the PA's General Intelligence Service:

In his pre-election platform, President Abbas promised to end financial corruption and implement major reforms, but he hasn't done much since then. Unfortunately, Abbas has surrounded himself with many of the thieves and officials who were involved in theft of public funds and who became icons of financial corruption.... Some of the most senior Palestinian officials didn't have even \$3,000 in their pocket when they arrived [after the signing of the Oslo Accords]. Yet we discovered that some of them had tens, if not hundreds, of millions of dollars in their bank accounts.... Had it not been for the presence of the Israeli authorities in the West Bank, Hamas would have done what they did in the Gaza Strip. It's hard to find people in the West Bank who support the Palestinian Authority. People are fed up with the financial corruption and mismanagement of the Palestinian Authority.⁷³

CONCLUSION

For nearly a century, Palestinian leaders have missed no opportunity to impede the development of Palestinian civil society and the attainment of Palestinian statehood. Had the Mufti chosen to lead his constituents to peace and reconciliation with their Jewish neighbors, as he promised the British officials who appointed him to his high rank in 1921, the Palestinians would have had their independent state over a substantial part of mandate Palestine by 1948, if not a decade earlier, and would have been spared the traumatic experience of dispersal and exile. Had Arafat set the PLO from the start on the path to peace and reconciliation