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The assassination plot Who killed Yasser Arafat?

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When the Palestinian leader was declared dead in a French hospital, on November 11, 2004, there was no way of knowing how questions pertaining to his death should be phrased. Was he killed, or did he die from old age? If he was killed, then who killed him and why? The 'mysterious' nature of his symptoms, galvanised a dominant theory that the man was poisoned over a period of time, provided enough evidence that foul play was involved, even indicting some of those closest to him. Although the man's story has been recorded in the ever-growing chronicle of the Palestinian struggle and Palestinians have somehow moved on, recent breaking news has blown his story wide open once more, breeding new controversy and stories of conspiracy. Nearly five years have passed since Arafat died. During those years, a number of high ranking Palestinian leaders, especially from the Hamas movement were assassinated by Israel in various and consistently gory methods. Among Palestinians, Arafat is referred to like all those killed by Israel, as a 'martyr', an indication of the widespread belief that his death was hardly the result of natural causes. If Arafat was indeed killed, and since his death was not caused by an Israeli air strike, or an assassin's bullet, a key question has been lingering, giving heed to all sorts of interpretations, who killed Arafat and how? Israelis made little secret of their desire to see Arafat dead. Former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon expressed regret in a newspaper interview on February 1, 2002 that he hadn't killed Arafat decades ago when he had the chance. Sharon told Israeli newspaper Maariv that he should have "eliminated" Arafat during its invasion of Lebanon in 1982. "Do you regret it (not killing Arafat)?" he was asked. "Certainly, yes," he replied. On the day of Arafat's death, BBC news carried comments by the then Israeli opposition leader Shimon Peres, saying it is "good that the world is rid of him...The sun is shining in the Middle East." Held hostage in his bullet-riddled West Bank office for years, Arafat represented an international embarrassment for Israel. He was not 'moderate' enough to concede all Palestinian rights, but 'moderate' enough to maintain an aura of international attention, and support among Arab, Muslim, European and other nations. Still, in the minds of some, Arafat was determined, and often declared to represent an 'obstacle'. The PA's truly 'moderate' camp disliked him for his tireless compromises aimed at prevented factional

infighting, thus blocking their attempts at dominating Palestinian society. Israel despised him for numerous reasons, notwithstanding his refusal to 'concede' on issues of paramount importance, such as the refugees and Jerusalem. The Bush administration took every opportunity to discredit, discount and insult him, constantly propping up an 'alternative' leadership, namely, Mahmoud Abbas, Mohammed Dahlan and others. Strangely enough, even Abbas and other high ranking PA officials referred to Arafat as a 'martyr', especially whenever they needed to capitalise on his legacy among low-ranking Fatah members and ordinary Palestinians. But the story was meant to end here, with Abbas and Dahlan, carrying the torch of Arafat the 'martyr' as they continue with their rhetoric-based 'revolution' to liberate Palestine. That, until the second highest-ranking Fatah member and one of the PLO's most visible leaders Farouk Kaddumi broadcast a document that contained some unanticipated indictments: that Abbas and Dahlan, along with Sharon, US Undersecretary of State William Burns, and others jointly plotted the assassination of Arafat. Kaddumi's document contained the minutes of that meeting, in 2004. Kaddumi broke the news in a press conference in Amman, Jordan on July 12, 2009, asserting that Arafat had entrusted him with the minutes of that secret meeting involving top Israeli, Palestinian and American leaders and officials. The plot, according to Kaddumi included the assassination of other Palestinian leaders, some of them have indeed been assassinated since then, while others are still alive, thanks to the failure of Israeli missiles and car bombs that failed to deliver. Expectedly, the Ramallah-based Fatah leaders launched fierce verbal attacks against Kaddumi, questioning his objectives, timing, and even his sanity. Abbas accused Kaddumi of wanting to torpedo the Fatah faction long-delayed congress, scheduled to convene in Bethlehem on August 4. "He (Kaddumi) knows full well that this information is false; he has released it to undermine the convention, but we are continuing with the preparations," Abbas said. Kaddumi had in fact criticised a convention of a supposedly 'revolutionary' movement held with Israeli consent, if not support. The fact is, we may never know the authenticity of Kaddumi's report without an independent investigation, or irrefutable evidence. However, similar to Arafat's death, conclusive evidence is not always required for the public to formulate an opinion over such issues. Considering Israel's threats to Arafat, Palestinians have no reason to believe that Israel did not kill him. Similarly, ordinary Palestinians, especially those in Gaza, have little reason to trust that corrupt Palestinians were not involved in Arafat's death. A clique of Palestinian elite have made it clear that their personal interests surpass those of the Palestinian people; Dahlan openly advocated the toppling of an elected government in Gaza, as the Ramallah-based 'revolutionary' movement, is dispatching US-armed and trained Palestinian militants to crack down on Israel's enemies in various West Bank towns. As bizarre as all of this may sound, it's at least enough to explain why Palestinians are willing to believe the recent statements made by Kaddumi, a respected figure among all Palestinian factions. True, Kaddumi's accusations are yet to be authenticated by an independent investigation, but they are made in a fractious, if not peculiar political context that makes them most plausible, and in a sense, that is the real tragedy. Khaleej Times