

Definition: **Arp** from *The Macquarie Dictionary*

1.

1887--1966, French sculptor, painter, and poet; one of the founders of Dada.

Summary Article: **Arafat, Yasir (1929-2004)**

From *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Terrorism*

During his lengthy tenure as a Palestinian leader, Yasir Arafat (aka Abu Ammar) played many roles, from terrorist to recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. While serving a chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and leader of the Palestinian Authority, Arafat remained an iconic figure, as famous for his fiery speeches as for sporting an unshaven chin and a checkered *kaffiyeh*, always shaped into a point to symbolize the map of Palestine.

Although Arafat, whose nom de guerre is Abu Ammar, cooperated with many biographers and gave countless interviews, many details of his life are uncertain. No consensus exists on his date or place of birth, for instance. His birth certificate shows he was born Mohammed Abder Rauf Arafat al Kudwa al Husseini in Cairo on August 24, 1929; Arafat maintained that he was born in Jerusalem on August 4, 1929, however. The sixth of seven children, he spent his early years in Cairo. His mother died when he was four, and Arafat and his younger brother were sent to live with an uncle in Jerusalem. He later returned to Cairo when his father, a Palestinian wholesale trader, remarried.

Arafat was active in politics from an early age, working as an aide for a relative in the Palestinian national movement. Before he entered his twenties, he was involved in smuggling guns from Egypt to Palestine. During his first years as an engineering student at Cairo University, he worked to organize fellow Palestinian students. In 1948 he left school to fight for Palestine as a volunteer in the first Arab-Israeli war.

After the Arab defeat, Arafat returned to Cairo. He later told biographers that he was so devastated that he considered abandoning the cause. He toyed with the idea of traveling to the United States to finish his studies, and even applied for a visa. Instead, he returned to the university in Cairo and decided to stay in Egypt. He continued to organize, and in 1952 he was elected president of the Union of Palestinian Students, and he created a student magazine called *The Voice of Palestine*.

Arafat later left Egypt for Kuwait, where he worked as a construction and contacting engineer. In 1957 he and his closest colleagues formed an underground movement, which became the first cell of his al Fatah group, which advocated an armed struggle for Palestine carried out by Palestinians themselves, not by other Arab countries and their armies. The group published a magazine, *Our Palestine: The Call to Life*, that called for the eradication of Israel. The publication helped al Fatah draw in new members, and Arafat gained the support of the Syrian government. With this backing, Fatah mounted its first raid into Israel in 1965. The group continued to infiltrate and attack Israel, crossing from Lebanon and Jordan. Arafat is said to have used multiple disguises when traveling, including that of an Egyptian tourist, a Pakistani businessman, and a shepherd.

In June 1967, Israel defeated Egypt, Syria, and Jordan in what has become known as the Six-Day War.

Israel then occupied the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank, forcing many Palestinians to become refugees. Arafat and other top Fatah leaders worked quickly to recruit displaced Palestinians. Fatah increased the number of its raids, attacking Israel from Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. Arafat and about 300 fighters set up a base in the town of Karameh, on the road between the West Bank and Jordan.

Israeli forces counterattacked Fatah bases and the homes of suspected terrorists. In March 1968, Israeli forces struck Karameh, in what was said to be the biggest single military action since the end of the Six-Day War. Fatah, backed by Jordanian artillery, held off the attack. Although Fatah had suffered many losses, Arafat celebrated the battle as a tactical victory, and many in the Arab world saw it as some remediation of the devastating 1967 defeat. At the same time, Fatah's ranks swelled. Arafat, already wearing his trademark *kaffiyeh*, became a famous symbol of Palestine and Palestinians, appearing on the cover of *Time* in December 1968.

In 1969, Fatah joined and gained control of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the coordinating body for Palestinian groups, and Arafat was elected chairman of the organization's executive committee. The PLO's primary bases of operation at this time were Palestinian refugee camps in eastern Jordan. The group suffered a major setback in September 1970, after members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine hijacked four international airliners and forced them to land outside of Amman, Jordan. Once the crisis was resolved, King Hussein of Jordan launched an offensive against the Palestinian forces, which were seen to be undermining the Jordanian government. PLO forces were defeated in the 10 days of fighting now called "Black September." Arafat reportedly fled Amman disguised as an Arab woman, and he and the PLO fighters were expelled from Jordan and settled in Lebanon.

After this setback, the remnants of the PLO staged further terror attacks to bring international attention to the situation of Palestinians. During the 1972 Olympics in Munich, Germany, 11 Israeli team members were killed in an attack perpetrated by an extremist group within al Fatah calling itself "Black September."

In November 1974, dressed in military fatigues and with a holstered gun on his hip, Arafat addressed the United Nations General Assembly in New York. He told the Assembly that he came "bearing an olive branch and a freedom fighter's gun." Diplomats from countries sympathetic to the PLO gave him a friendly reception, and by 1977 more than 100 nations had given the PLO diplomatic recognition.

Arafat and the PLO spent 11 years in Lebanon, which was home to many Palestinian refugees. However, the PLO's presence added to the strife among different groups in Lebanon and helped fuel the Lebanese civil war. The Israeli Defense Minister, Gen. Ariel Sharon, advocated the destruction of the PLO. When Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982, Arafat and many PLO guerrillas evacuated Beirut under international guarantees of safety. Just two weeks after their departure, a militia of Lebanese Christians allied with Israel massacred hundreds of unarmed Palestinian refugees in the city's Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. Many Palestinians have never forgiven Arafat for evacuating and leaving those in the camps unprotected.

In 1983, senior al Fatah officials broke with Arafat. With Syrian backing, they attacked Arafat and his fighters in Tripoli, Lebanon. Arafat and his troops were evacuated and PLO forces were dispersed throughout Tunisia, Yemen, Algeria, Jordan, Iraq, and Syria. Arafat moved PLO headquarters to Tunis, Tunisia. In 1985, members of Force 17, Arafat's personal security squad, killed three Israelis on a

hijacked yacht at Larnaca, Cyprus. The PLO claimed that the men were members of Mossad, Israel's secret intelligence service. Israel responded by bombing PLO headquarters; 65 people were killed, but Arafat was unharmed.

In the late 1980s, Arafat began strong and effective negotiations for peace. What motivated Arafat's shift to a political strategy—and, indeed, whether it was a sincere shift on Arafat's part or merely a smokescreen to hide terrorist activities—is a matter of heated debate. Many experts point to Arafat's plane crash in the Libyan desert in October 1992 as an essential turning point. Arafat may also have become more aware of his own vulnerability due to the assassination of some of his comrades: Khalil al Wazir, the head of the PLO terrorist operations against Israel, was killed by Mossad, Israel's intelligence service, in Tunis in

1988, while Salah Khalef, a PLO intelligence officer and key figure in al Fatah, and Hayil Abd al Hamid, the security chief of al Fatah, were both killed in 1991 by the rival Abu Nidal Organization in a campaign of inter-Palestinian fratricide stemming from Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. Arafat's own encroaching age may also have been a factor in his shift toward a political solution.

Speaking in Stockholm in 1988, Arafat declared that the PLO accepted the existence of Israel. Under his leadership, the PLO accepted UN Security Council Resolution 242, which had laid out the basis for Middle East peace negotiations two decades before, and agreed that Israel had a right to coexist with Palestine. Later that year, Arafat spoke before a special session of the United Nations General Assembly in Geneva and called on Israel to join peace talks. The following day, President Ronald Reagan of the United States authorized the start of what he called a “substantive dialogue” with the PLO, saying that it had met the U.S. conditions.

As Arafat became an ever more public figure, he increasingly kept his private life hidden. Arafat was seen by the press as a notorious bachelor, famous for saying, “I am married to all the women of Palestine.” In fact, Arafat was secretly married in 1990, to Suha al Taweel, a Paris-educated Christian. She converted to Islam but is still not entirely accepted by some extremists inside the Arafat camp. Arafat didn't publicly admit to the marriage until 1992.

As the PLO advocated a more moderate stance and worked to join in diplomatic negotiations, Arafat's leadership came under fire from militant Palestinian groups, including Hamas and Abu Nidal's breakaway Fatah Revolutionary Council, both of which supported a build up of Palestinian military strength.

Arafat would again become persona non grata in the United States when he stridently supported Iraq during the Persian Gulf War. During the war, many Arab countries stopped supporting the PLO financially and began supporting the more extreme group (and Fatah rival) Hamas, instead.

In 1993 Arafat took part in secret meetings with Israeli diplomats in Oslo, Norway. These meetings culminated in the signing of the 1993 PLO-Israel Declaration of Principles. After signing the declaration in Washington on September 13, Arafat and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin of Israel shook hands on the White House lawn—an unprecedented and historic moment. In 1994 Arafat was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, along with Rabin and Israeli foreign minister Shimon Peres. During the same year, Arafat signed the Gaza-Jericho accord and returned to the Gaza Strip after 27 years in exile.

In January 1996 Arafat was elected president of the Palestinian Authority, which governed the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Two years later, during negotiations at the Wye River Plantation in Maryland, he and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu signed an agreement that guaranteed the return of an

additional 13 percent of West Bank land to Palestinian control.

In 2000 Arafat walked away from negotiations with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak at Camp David in the United States. Peace negotiations reached a stalemate in the years that followed. In December 2001, responding to a series of suicide bombings committed by the al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, which many experts believed to be under Arafat's control, the Israeli military began a siege of Ramallah on the West Bank. Arafat was trapped in the city and then confined to his headquarters. He remained in his compound until May 2, 2002, when he and his staff were released as part of an international agreement that required the convicted murderers of an Israeli minister serve time in a Palestinian jail, supervised by the United States and Britain.

The United States government was often disappointed with Arafat's leadership, but U.S. administrations were usually willing to work with him in pursuit of a political solution—he was, after all, the elected president of the Palestinian Authority. Others accused Arafat of hypocrisy, saying that he claimed to be in favor of peace but consistently failed to discipline those who perpetrated acts of terror. Some experts doubted Arafat's ability to govern the violent elements of his community, while others questioned his desire to do so.

Arafat died in 2004 while receiving medical treatment in a Paris suburb for a mysterious illness. Controversial even in death, rumors swirled that Arafat might have had the flu, AIDS, or even been poisoned by Israel's Mossad. Leaked reports of Arafat's confidential medical records suggested that cirrhosis of the liver might have been the true culprit; observers suggested that the illness's association with alcoholism in the public mind was the true motivation for all the secrecy. (Arafat was not known to have consumed alcohol, and not all cases of cirrhosis are caused by it.)

Mahmoud Abbas succeeded Arafat as the chairman of the PLO, but the years following Arafat's death have been marked by vicious infighting between various Palestinian groups, with Hamas and Fatah struggling violently for domination. So far, no leader has emerged who comes close to possessing Arafat's ability to maintain an equilibrium between the many competing factions.

See Also:

al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, al Asifa, Fatah, Force 17, Munich Olympics Massacre, Palestine Liberation Organization

Further Readings

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