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Middle East

TWO-FACED YASIR

by Daniel Pipes
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WHEN YASIR ARAFAT SHOOK HANDS with Israel's Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in September 1993, he made two main promises: to include in his public statements that the PLO "encourages and calls upon" Palestinians to take part in "rejecting violence and terrorism"; and to "achieve co-existence" with Israel—implying an acceptance of the Jewish state as a permanent fact of life.

Israelis vociferously disagree on how well he has kept those promises. Foreign Minister Shimon Peres declares Arafat to be "the one and only Palestinian leader with whom Israel can and should negotiate." A Likud party statement calls Arafat someone "who continues the Nazi way." Who's right? Has Arafat fulfilled his obligations or not?

There is no easy answer, for Arafat is a study in contradiction. Accepting the Nobel Prize in Oslo, he seemed genuinely to advocate peace and stability:

"Like their Arab brethren, the Palestinians, whose cause is the guardian of the gate of the Arab-Israeli peace, are looking forward to a comprehensive, just, and durable peace on the basis of land for peace and compliance with international legitimacy and its resolutions."

But in Gaza a few months later, he repeatedly called for jihad (righteous war) against Israel: "We will go on with the jihad, a long jihad, a difficult jihad, an exhausting jihad, martyrs, battles. But this is the path of victory, the path of glory, the path of jihad, not just for the Palestinian people but for the entire Arab nation."

We have systematically analyzed 244 public statements (including speeches, press conferences, and interviews) made by Arafat in the year starting July 1, 1994, just as he took control of the Gaza Strip and Jericho, and ending on June 30, 1995. In all, slightly over half (126) were addressed to Westerners, and slightly fewer (118) to Muslims.

• *Rejecting Violence:* Fifty-one statements are helpful in assessing whether Arafat kept his promises to discourage violence against Israel. Not only did Arafat take up this subject with Westerners three times more often than with Muslims (38 to 13), but the former heard a message significantly different from the latter. In just over half of his statements to a Western audience, Arafat condemns violence. For example, to an Israeli journalist, he said that he abhorred the suicide bombing by Islamic Jihad in November 1994: "We hold a very grave view of the attack in Netzarim. . . . We totally reject such acts. It has been decided to take the appropriate steps in reaction. Such steps are the arrests carried out among the Islamic Jihad activists. We have arrested 136 Islamic Jihad members." A month later, responding to the suicide bombing of a Jerusalem bus, Arafat (through his spokesman) called the incident a "criminal act" and wished the wounded "a speedy recovery."

But on the 13 occasions Arafat mentioned terrorist violence to Muslim listeners, he not once condemned its practice against Israelis. Arafat is a master of avoidance; though he immediately condemned the suicide bombing at Netzarim to Israelis, not one of his nine statements to Arab audiences in the week that followed even mentioned the atrocity. At other times, he wiggles out of questions. When a London-based Arabic newspaper asked him in February 1995 whether Hamas's violence against Israelis constituted legitimate acts of jihad, Arafat insouciantly ignored the question: "What I would like to say is that we must all respect the agreements concluded in the times of war and peace. . . . I wonder why Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and the Syria-based and Jordan-based factions do not carry out their operations from Syria and Jordan, par-

ticularly since there are borders between Syria and Israel and between Jordan and Israel. Why are they making us look as if we are held responsible for this?" Arafat, it would appear, cares not to discourage violence but to make sure Jordan and Syria get blamed for it.

Arafat also hints that Israel's government is partly behind the violence against its own citizens, to discredit the Palestinian Authority he heads, and thus to slow down the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the West Bank. Along these lines, he stated in April 1995 that "The target is not Israel, which is not against" the members of Hamas who are engaging in anti-Israel terrorism. "These operations' objective is to allow Israel to use the issue of security or the lack of it as an excuse for stopping the implementation of what we agreed on."

Finally, Arafat sometimes invites more violence. At the Seventh Islamic Conference Organization Summit in December 1994, he called for continued jihad: "Today, I come to you for the first time from Palestine, the homeland which has not yet been liberated from the Israeli occupation which is weighing heavily on our people. . . . Let our jihad continue until an independent Palestinian state is established, with holy Jerusalem as its capital." An Arab audience in May 1995 heard a similar appeal: "Everyone should view himself as a recruit in the ferocious battle we are fighting to protect Jerusalem and our sanctities in it."

So Arafat keeps his word in condemning violence to Westerners—those least likely to strap on a bomb and blow up an Israeli bus in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv. But he fails to follow through with his fellow Arabs, before whom he never condemns a specific terrorist attack against Israelis. Arafat thus keeps the letter but not the spirit of his promise.

• *Accepting Israel.* What about accepting the State of Israel's permanence? Although Arafat refers to Israel in nearly all of his public statements (often as "the occupation"), only 20 or so of them are pertinent to this question. Just as with violence, Arafat sends a mixed message in these 20 statements.

To Westerners, he fully accepts Israel's permanence. For example, addressing Israeli youth in a July 1994 interview, he spoke of "a new era for our new generations," pointing to a break from the past. He went on: "A new era in the Middle East has started. And, we are neighbors, we can coordinate, cooperate, in all fields by all means for the sake of our new children." On another occasion, Arafat spoke warmly of an enduring peace based in the holy city of Jerusalem: "There must be no walls between East Jerusalem and West Jerusalem, no Berlin Wall. Jerusalem will be a

symbol of the peace of the brave, of coexistence between two peoples—the Israelis and Palestinians."

To Arab audiences, predictably, Arafat sends a different signal. While he never denies Israel's permanence, he does hedge, stressing legal obligations rather than political attitudes. He talks dramatically of respecting the agreement with Israel, not of accepting Israel. "We have signed the peace of the brave," he told a press conference on July 1, 1994. "Our views may differ, but if a Palestinian child signs an agreement on behalf of the Palestinian people, we will be committed to his signature. So it is the case if the signing is made by a Palestinian delegation or authority. We will build the peace of the brave and preserve it." In a speech to an Arab audience in Gaza, Arafat said: "We call [the Declaration of Principles] an agreement of the courageous, and we will honor this agreement of the courageous just as we have pledged." With Arab audiences, Arafat skips the more emotional sentiments he occasionally expresses to the West (mutual recognition, peaceful coexistence of Palestinians and Israelis) in favor of an official, legalistic endorsement of the agreement's sanctity.

Which is the real Arafat? A clue may lie in the revealing statement he made to a Spanish newspaper in October 1994, when asked if he differed from the Arafat of 1974, the one who appeared before the United Nations with an olive branch in one hand and a Kalashnikov in the other. "In no way at all," he replied. "I am not a chameleon, I cannot change my coat." By his own words, then, Arafat is the same person of twenty years earlier. The only difference is that, for the most part, he now holds up only an olive branch for the West and a Kalashnikov for his fellow Arabs.

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