

How Yasir Arafat Destroyed Palestine

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In a Ruined Country

The war for Jerusalem that began after Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's failed peace offer at Camp David in the summer of 2000 has become the subject of legends and fables, each one of which is colored in the distinctive shades of the political spectrum from which it emerged: Yasir Arafat tried to control the violence. Arafat was behind the violence. Arafat was the target of the violence, which he deflected onto the Israelis. Depending on which day of the week it was, any combination of these statements might have been true.

In his patchwork uniform, which combined a military tunic with a traditional kaffiya, the Old Man, as those who had known Yasir Arafat the longest called him, was a strange and defiantly contradictory person. He was the father of the Palestinian nation, and the successor to the Muslim conquerors of Jerusalem, Omar Ibn al-Khattab and Saladin. His official title was rais of the Palestinian Authority, a title that is ambiguously translated as "chairman" or "president." Arafat was also the chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization and the head of Fatah, the PLO's central faction, which he founded in Kuwait in the late 1950s. The title that came first on his personal stationery was head of Fatah, which means "conquest"—a backward acronym for Harakat al-Tahrir al-Falistiniya, the Palestinian Liberation Movement. Spelled forward the acronym yields "Hataf," which means "death."

Arafat's failure to conquer Jerusalem did not shatter his conviction that history was moving in his favor: under pressure from within and without, isolated in the world, the State of Israel would eventually crack apart and dissolve, to be replaced by Arab Palestine. "We will continue our struggle until a Palestinian boy or a Palestinian girl waves our flag on the walls, mosques, and churches of Jerusalem, the capital of our independent state, whether some people are happy about it or not," he promised. "He who doesn't like it may drink the water of the Dead Sea." Arafat understood his actions as part of an unfolding within the long duration of historical time rather than as disembodied headlines on CNN. The inability of his diplomatic interlocutors to understand what he was driving at exposed the fatal limits of the Western conception of politics as a way to find a happy medium between competing interests.

Arafat's given name, Muhammad Abd al-Rahman Abd al-Raouf Arafat al-Kidwa al-Husseini, provides close readers with a biography in brief of the man who created a nation out of the Arab refugees from the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. The boy Muhammad Abd al-Rahman was born in Cairo on August 24, 1929, and grew up in the city's Sakakini district. Both his parents were Palestinians. His father, Abd al-Raouf, was a merchant from Gaza. In the late 1920s Abd al-Raouf left Gaza to prosecute a claim to a large chunk of Cairo that he believed was the rightful property of his family. The claim was futile, and preoccupied him until the day he died. Arafat seldom mentioned his father and didn't attend his funeral. His mother, Zahwa, for whom he named his only child, was a daughter of the al-Saud family, whose home in the Old City of Jerusalem was part of the neighborhood that was bulldozed by the Israelis after the 1967 war to create a plaza in front of the Western Wall. Although not born in Jerusalem, as he often claimed, Arafat did live in the al-Saud family house for several years with his brother Fathi after his mother died, in 1933. Arafat's grandfather was named Arafat, and his family name was al-Kidwa. His clan was the al-Husseinis of Gaza, not the famous Jerusalem family. "Arafat" was the only part of his given name that he would carry into adulthood; "Yasir" was a childhood nickname related to the word for "wealthy" or "easy." He didn't like school, and showed an early talent for organizing the neighborhood kids. "He formed them into groups and made them march and drill," his sister Inam told a biographer. "He carried a stick to beat those who did not obey his commands. He also liked making camps in the garden of our house."

It made sense that a people without a homeland, with only a recent shared history of expulsion, flight, catastrophe, shame, and defeat to bind them together, would fall under Arafat's spell. He was famous for his mastery of al-taqiya, the ability to dodge a threat, and of muamara, conspiracy. Those who met him, even his intimates, inevitably described themselves as rahba, awestruck. The man they met was mutawaadi and baseet—humble and modest. As much as any other man, Arafat was responsible for the making of the modern Middle East. The raids he launched on Israel from Gaza, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon in the 1960s helped to precipitate the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, which stripped the Arab regimes of their credibility and set the stage for Arafat's emergence as the Arab Che Guevara. Arafat's creation of a Palestinian para-state inside Lebanon in the 1970s made him a wealthy man, and a linchpin of Soviet strategy in the region. Expelled from Beirut in 1982 by Ariel Sharon, he went into exile in Tunis, where he watched with surprise as a younger generation of Palestinians rose up against the Israeli occupation in 1987. His support for Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War left him broke and stripped of his political assets in the early nineties, and out of touch with the young revolutionaries in the West Bank and Gaza. In 1993 Arafat signed the Oslo Accords, which committed Israel and the United States to a process whose end point would be the establishment of a Palestinian state. He returned to Gaza through Egypt on July 1, 1994.

In a largely traditional society Arafat stood out because he was self-made, the symbolic incarnation of a people that owed its continued existence to him. Decades before he began to show his age in public, his lips trembling, his hands shaking, his belly distended—even then he was known as the Old Man. His speeches were laundry lists of slogans and exhortatory phrases such as "Ya jabal ma yahzak reeh" ("O mountain, the wind cannot shake you!") and "Li-l-Quds rayyihin, shuhada bi-l-malayyin"

("To Jerusalem we march, martyrs by the millions") interspersed with Koranic verses. The symbolic leader of the Palestinian nation spoke with a pronounced Egyptian accent. His lips flapped when he spoke. To some, the combination was irredeemably comic. He distinguished himself within the Palestinian national movement by his boundless energy for the cause, alqadhiya, which might also be translated as "the case," a term appropriate to a proceeding in a courtroom. One of the peculiarities of the nation that Arafat created was that it was founded on a festering grievance rather than any positive imagination of the future; the worse things were in the present, the stronger the Palestinian case became.

For the diplomats of the European Union, whose dream of creating a new kind of political organization that would rival the United States for global influence was burdened by the historical guilt of colonialism and the Holocaust, the image of the Jew as oppressor that Arafat offered the world was both novel and liberating; the State of Israel would become the Other of a utopian new world order that would be cleansed of destructive national, religious, and particularistic passions.

Perhaps it was the clownish aspect of Arafat's behavior that made it easy for the leaders of Israel, the United States, and Europe to believe that Arafat was a minor tribal chieftain whose true aim was to enjoy red-carpet treatment during his visits to the White House and to other seats of civilized government. The Palestinian leader was fond of time-saving measures, and could cite the exact number of hours that shaving once every five days, as he did, could add to a man's life. He spent his spare hours watching cartoons on television. His favorites were Road Runner, Bugs Bunny, and Tom and Jerry. It took Arafat more than an hour each morning to arrange the tail of his kaffiya in the shape of Palestine and pin it to the shoulder of one of his tunics, which his guards bought for him in military-surplus stores in the cities they visited. He completed his fanciful outfit with a pin in the shape of a phoenix, symbolizing the rise of the Palestinian people from the ash heap of history, along with a variety of military ribbons and decorations that testified to his self-appointed status as "the only undefeated general in the Middle East." In ranks behind the decorations were felt-tipped pens of different colors, to which court gossips liked to attribute decisive significance. Green ink was for his reports. Red ink meant that someone was to receive a certain sum of money; or else red ink meant that his signature was to be ignored. Inside the pockets of his jacket were the small black notebooks in which he wrote about money. When he was in doubt about a particular sum, he would withdraw a notebook with a flourish, cite a specific figure, and then put the notebook back in his pocket. Inside the notebooks were the codes that unlocked the secret bank accounts to which only he had access. When his private plane went down in the Libyan desert in 1992 and could not be located for thirteen hours, a great and memorable panic seized the leadership of the PLO at the thought that the remnants of the organization's vast financial empire had disappeared in the wreckage.

After Arafat died, on November 11, 2004, there were some who believed that the chaos and violence that he had brought with him to the Palestinian territories might follow him to the grave, and that peace between Israelis and Palestinians might finally be at hand. There were others who noted the absence of any clear cause of death in the voluminous files provided by the military hospital south of Paris where he died. Some of his closest aides and advisers spoke openly of their belief that he had been poisoned. Suspects in the poisoning included the Israelis, the Palestinians, the Jordanians, the Egyptians, and the CIA, as well as a team of cyclists for peace who had visited Arafat the previous September. Only the idea that Arafat might have expired from natural causes was deemed too farfetched for serious consideration.

There were also those among his closest aides who found the discussion of the Old Man's death unseemly and distracting. The Old Man was a great figure in history, they believed. It was the Old Man who had created the Palestinian people out of a host of miserable refugees. It was the Old Man who had brought the Palestinians back to Palestine.

Several weeks after Arafat's death I visited the Muqata, his compound in Ramallah, the West Bank city that serves as the Palestinian capital. There I found groups of workmen carrying garbage out of the ruined buildings as if they were excavating the burrow of an animal. As I stood and watched, a group of a hundred soldiers in matching brown uniforms emerged from their barracks and stood more or less at attention as they were inspected by a senior officer. These are the faces of Palestine, I thought, the faces of the conquerors and the conquered of the past thousand years—sharp-featured Arabs, fierce-looking Turks, light-skinned Europeans, dark-skinned Egyptian-looking soldiers from Jericho and Gaza. In response to their officer's command, they turned and faced a rubble-strewn field above which hung a poster of Arafat in a Soviet overcoat, waving goodbye. The Arabic motto on the poster read, "On Your Way to Fulfill the Palestinian Dream." Behind him was the golden dome of the Mosque of Omar.

The Bodyguard

In the weeks that follow Arafat's burial in the parking lot of the Muqata, beneath an honor guard of transplanted olive trees, members of Arafat's inner circle decide, one by one, that it is important for his story to be told, and agree to talk to me.

Awaiting their pleasure, I arrange to stay in a private apartment in East Jerusalem that belongs to a friend, and that is otherwise empty during the winter. In the mornings, as I wait outside in the rain for a car to pick me up, I watch the children walk to school—the boys holding hands with boys, the girls in hijab walking to a nearby girls' school that Jewish would-be terrorists have tried to blow up with a bomb. The girls wear the hijab close to their skulls in a way that pulls back the skin on their foreheads and prevents stray hairs from escaping. They also wear blue jeans under their skirts. Across the street is the Don Derma family restaurant, which quaintly advertises "cocktails" and serves ice cream and coffee in the evenings.

I have different cars and drivers depending on what day it is and where I want to go. When I want to go to Gaza, or to the refugee camps, I travel in a white Land Rover with a sticker from an international aid organization where three of my friends have found work. Most of my official meetings are arranged for me by two local translators, without whom I am often as helpless as a child. The going rate for a translator with decent contacts is \$150 to \$200 a day. N., a hard-core supporter of Fatah, speaks seven languages, including German, Italian, Arabic, and Hebrew. She was born in Haifa and carries an Israeli passport. She was recommended to me by a Palestinian functionary in Ramallah who welcomed the opportunity to monitor my movements and contacts. N.'s loyalty to Fatah means that she has connections that more neutral translators lack; when she hands off unmarked packages to men who dart out of storefronts and alleyways near al-Manara Square, in Ramallah, I decide that it is best to play dumb. Her favorite game is to drive the wrong way through oncoming traffic at checkpoints as the soldiers draw their guns and order us to stop. "Sahafia—journalist!" she will shout, leaving me to plead our case.

One evening I go to see one of Arafat's bodyguards, Abu Helmi, at his well-secured apartment in Ramallah. To reach the Qalandia checkpoint visitors must pass the ugly concrete wall that divides the outer Arab villages from East Jerusalem, and then an open field of rubble. To the left of the rubble there is always a traffic jam at the checkpoint. After four years of war, crossing from one side to the other remains a haphazard affair. The road is cut by a snarl of concrete blocks and barbed wire whose makeshift appearance belies the fact that it is a permanent feature of the landscape. Getting through the checkpoint from Jerusalem to Ramallah takes about thirty to forty-five minutes. The return trip to Jerusalem can take up to four hours. After my days with N. are over, I sometimes go back out with Q., a translator who is close to members of Arafat's private guard. Q. grew up in Jerusalem and hates Fatah, and is an excellent source of rumors and gossip. At night the potholes are harder to spot, and the road stinks of burning garbage.

On the night that Arafat was buried, Abu Helmi stayed up with the rest of the Old Man's guards to see who would come and pay their respects. He was amazed that so many of the inner circle didn't come.

Abu Helmi is a simple man, of unbreakable tribal loyalties. His eyes fill with tears at the mention of the Old Man as he shows us photographs from the old days. Thirty pounds heavier than in the earliest of the photos, but with the same dark hair and bushy moustache, Abu Helmi bears a marked physical resemblance to Saddam Hussein. It was Abu Helmi's job to travel ahead and make the arrangements when the Old Man visited foreign countries. When the Old Man's plane went down in the Libyan desert, Abu Helmi suffered an injury to his back. He walks stiffly over to a wide chest of drawers, which contains several thousand photographs of the Old Man taken on airstrips in Mali, Uganda, Comoros, and other faraway places where the Palestine Liberation Organization invested its money and the Old Man was welcomed as a head of state. There are photos of the Old Man with Muammar Qaddafi in Tripoli, and in a pilgrim's robes in Mecca.

"I don't want to speak about Abu Ammar as a president or a revolutionary leader; I want to speak about Abu Ammar the father," Abu Helmi begins, referring to the Palestinian leader by another of his familiar nicknames. ("Abu Ammar," meaning "father of Ammar," is a fossilized cognomen for "Yasir," which refers to a faithful companion of the prophet Muhammad.) As he speaks, Abu Helmi stirs his coffee with a sugar spoon that he squeezes gently between forefinger and thumb.

"For many years, at nights, we would suddenly wake up, with him coming over to see if we were covered, if we were sleeping or resting," Abu Helmi says. "During the meals, when there were no guests, we always ate together. He was always insisting, giving us food, spreading, cutting, saying 'Eat, eat.' If he was really happy with someone, he would insist that he feed him from the food on his plate into his mouth. He was always keeping us patient and telling us, 'Patience is not measured by the hour.'

"Always he would notice very small details—even if someone hadn't shaved for a day, he would always notice it and say, 'Why haven't you shaved?' He insisted that we wear ties and that we look good and that we appear to the world as we are, as civilized people."

"Did Abu Ammar enjoy that people around him had lavish things although his own life was so modest?" I ask.

"He was very pleased," Abu Helmi answers. "He never minded. He used to say, 'These people deserve to live—they should enjoy their life.'"

"Would he remember a mistake long after it had happened?" I ask.

"He doesn't forget. Not the right or the wrong. For us, he never refused anything. Once my niece, the daughter of our martyr, my brother, she was about to get married, and I went in to ask permission to attend that marriage in Jordan, and Abu Ammar immediately agreed, and he insisted that I carry a present of gold. Whenever there was a celebration or wedding, and we used to invite him by card, he would send the congratulations."

Abu Helmi's youngest son, who speaks fluent English, and is paralyzed from the neck down, is carried in through the living room and laid on a hospital bed, where he can hear the conversation. Abu Helmi's daughter brings more coffee from the kitchen.

"Abu Ammar started his day at nine a.m. until one-thirty in the afternoon," Abu Helmi says, wiping a bit of coffee from his thick black moustache. "One-thirty was his nap time, and lunch until four-thirty. Then it would stretch late into the night. Whenever he woke up to pray the dawn prayers, which was about three-thirty, he would always come out to check on us and to see what was going on, 'Do I need to make any phone calls?' He was always in constant surveillance of his work. Any issue or request that reaches the hands of Abu Ammar—it must be solved immediately."

After the Israelis attacked the Muqata in 2002, during Operation Defensive Shield, the Old Man sandbagged the windows for fear that he would be shot by Israeli snipers. Proclaiming himself to be under siege, he refused to leave the Muqata until his final illness, in October of 2004. On sunny afternoons he positioned a chair in the breezeway between the ruins of the compound's main building, a former British prison, and the modern office building next door. Here he talked on his cell phone and read telegrams from foreign ministers of Europe, African heads of state, and other notables expressing solidarity with the Palestinian cause, the careful records of which were preserved on his presidential Web site. "Nahnu la al-hunud al-humr [We are not the red Indians]," he often proclaimed to the reporters who came to see him. On slow afternoons he liked to sit outside the Muqata with his guards.

"We would always be gathered around him," Abu Helmi remembers. "Sometimes we would bring fruit and peel it for him or make cookies here at home. He would ask, 'From where did you bring this?' And we would say, 'We made it at home, it's cheaper than buying it at the market.' He would say, 'Look at this guy, look how he's dressed.' He would always say, if he saw a chocolate, 'This is too much calories,' or 'Too much fat.'"

"How did Abu Ammar feel about Yitzhak Rabin?"

"He loved him," Abu Helmi says, with all apparent sincerity. "When I mention Rabin, I say, 'May God bless his soul.' That means great respect and great affection."

"Do you remember what Abu Ammar felt about the Israeli leaders who followed Rabin—about Peres and Netanyahu and Barak?"

At this question Abu Helmi laughs, and makes a sharp cutting motion with his hand.

Two old friends who didn't Make it to Arafat's funeral

Dennis Ross was the chief Middle East negotiator for the United States from 1993 to 2000. I interviewed him in Washington, and I see him again one evening at the American Colony Hotel, in Jerusalem, beneath the starry ceiling of the Pasha Room.

"I walked into this villa in Tunis," Ross tells me, "nice but not extraordinary, and the first thing I noticed when I walk in is it had the feel of a revolutionary hangout, but not revolutionary in the sense of these guys who are out there blowing up people. It reminded me of when I was a student activist in Berkeley. You saw posters of Arafat as a young man. You saw posters of Abu Iyad and Abu Jihad, and you had the feeling 'Geez, these were the founders of Fatah,' and it was like a lair, a revolutionary lair, and I'm struck by this feeling, like I'm back in a kind of activist hangout where people are thinking, 'What can we do today?' And I have that feeling until I get through the outer room, and then I see these guys through a mesh curtain laughing at *The Golden Girls*. I hear Bea Arthur's voice, and the incongruity of being in this revolutionary lair and Bea Arthur's voice—you know, I started to laugh. And I thought, 'What kind of revolutionary hangout is it where the people watch *The Golden Girls*?'"

"The first time I went to complain to him about the bombing—the first set of bombings were, I guess, in April '94, in Hadera and Afula—and I'm with him, and he leans over like this and he whispers, 'You know, it's Barak. He's got this group, the OSS, in the Israeli military, and they're doing this.' And I said to him, 'Don't be ridiculous.' I said, 'You know the Israelis are not killing themselves.' This was classic Arafat, never wanting to be responsible."

Q: "So you don't think that he was actually a hysteric?"

A: "No, I think it was all an act."

Terje Roed-Larsen was the father of the Oslo Accords and is the most visible representative of the United Nations in the Middle East. A handsome man with a puckish sense of humor, he is also a bit of a dandy. On the afternoon that I meet him for a long conversation about Oslo, he is wearing a white pocket square in the breast of his dove-gray suit, which he has accented with a pair of silver cufflinks. He met weekly and often every other day with Arafat for more than a decade.

"Usually he would say, 'I agree in principle,'" Roed-Larsen told me, "which means 'No.' Or 'Why not?'—which also means 'No.' Or 'I have to think about it.' Or 'It's not me, it's Hamas.' Or 'I'm doing my best.'"

Q: "What was it like when he lied to you?"

A: "He lied all the time. And he knew it. I'd say, 'Abu Ammar, cut the crap. Let's talk serious.' And then he could either talk serious or not talk serious. He'd say nonsense."

Q: "The nonsense would consist of what?"

A: "'It's not me—it's al-Qaeda.' 'It's the Iranians.' 'It was a Lebanese ship.' 'It's the Syrians.' All that kind of stuff. Of course everybody around him knew he was behind it. He didn't tell any of his closest companions. Because he always operated with layers and layers and layers and layers. He was extremely compartmentalized. His dirty-tricks domain—he didn't inform any of his ministers. They didn't have a clue about it. He had a financial cupboard. He had a dirty-tricks cupboard. He had a white-business cupboard. He had a black-business cupboard. Everything was compartmentalized. He was a master manipulator, and in a way he was a master politician who made catastrophic mistakes in both moral and political terms. He thought he was immortal; he trusted that he had God's hand protecting him for everything. And he goes away in the middle of the biggest defeat of his life. That was one of the reasons he was so miserable before he died."

Q: "Do you remember the last time you talked to him?"

A: "I was at home in Herzlyia on a Sunday. I remember it vividly. I hadn't spoken to him in eighteen months. My cell phone rings."

Roed-Larsen's voice suddenly gets higher, and then he starts screeching like someone's crazy old aunt.

"'Terje! Terje! It is Abu Ammar! How are you? How are you? How was the holiday?' And then he says, 'Ah-dah-dah, always remember, Terje, eh, your wife is my sister! my sister! my sister! And I am the uncle of your children. Your children, the uncle!' And then he said, 'And you are always welcome to see me when you wish.' That was it. He got sick the week after, and then he died."

"We announce Tourism!"

The drive from Jerusalem to Nablus, the West Bank city that is known in the Hebrew Bible as Shchem, home to Jacob and his children, takes about two hours. Or it might take three hours. Or it could take five. My friend Nadir is driving me there to visit Munib al-Masri, one of Yasir Arafat's oldest friends and now the richest man in Palestine.

The line of vehicles at the Nablus checkpoint this afternoon is short. Cabdrivers wait on the other side of the barrier to take passengers to their destinations inside the city. In the separate lane for settlers three religious Jewish children, two boys and a young girl, try to hitch a ride back to their fortresslike dwellings on the rocky hillside.

Nablus is a city built between two biblical mountains, Har Grizim and Har Ebal. In the Bible, Har Grizim was blessed with a bountiful spring, and Har Ebal was cursed. Al-Masri's gorgeous neo-Palladian house sits on top of Har Grizim, overlooking the refugee camps and the old casbah of Nablus. Visitors are greeted by a statue of Hercules in the center of the hall. Sunlight shining in from a dome above traces the hour on the polished marble floor. Other rooms, which I wander through with the gentle encouragement of my host, contain such varied treasures as the floor of a 2,000-year-old Roman villa, a Rafaelo tapestry, seventeenth-century French dining-room furniture, and what al-Masri proclaims to be the oldest mirror in the world, which originally came from Venice, and which broke on its way here from Ramallah. One of al-Masri's sons designed the house. Five hundred men with donkeys carried out his plans at the height of the intifada, carting the stones and the precious antiques up the side of the mountain.

A hawkishly handsome man of seventy-one, al-Masri was born in Nablus and graduated from the University of Texas. He is the rare example of a wealthy Palestinian who made his money elsewhere and came back to Palestine out of nationalist motives.

"Yes, the Palestinians missed a lot of opportunities, but don't blame us," he tells me. "We were a million people in this land, and the Israelis were less than a hundred thousand people. But they came here very determined, and they worked very hard. Then they committed a few massacres that made people afraid, and then our stupid leaders told the people to leave. We always tend to say it's a Zionist plot with the British. What we call a plot, they call a plan."

As one of the leading financiers of the Palestinian national movement, al-Masri was close to Arafat for almost half a century. His first acquaintance with the movement came when he was the head of Phillips Petroleum operations in Algeria, where he met Khalil al-Wazir, otherwise known as Abu Jihad, the organizational genius of the Fatah movement, who was assassinated in Tunis in 1988. Al-Wazir had been sent to Algeria to open Fatah's first official bureau at the invitation of the Algerian revolutionary Ben Bella.

"One day I found somebody in front of me who said his name was Khalil al-Wazir," al-Masri recalls. "He made a favorable impression. I liked him. Maybe six months later another guy came. It was Arafat. It was late '63, and he starts coming back. I didn't like at the time the way Yasir Arafat spoke, because he spoke in Egyptian dialect. Arafat told me, 'What can I do? I went to school there. I did this and I did that.' And we became very good friends. I felt a great sympathy toward him, this little guy."

He made believe that he was born in Jerusalem. He loved Jerusalem. He loved Jerusalem a lot. Oh, in that early period he was very dynamic. Piercing eyes, and always 'the cause.' Always a pamphlet or something to show me."

Al-Masri made a fortune in the oil-services business, and was invited to serve as a minister in the Jordanian cabinet by his friend the Jordanian prime minister, Wasfi al-Tal. By then Yasir Arafat was the head of the PLO and the hero of the battle of Karamah, in March of 1968, when he led a strong fight against an invading Israeli column and then displayed captured Israeli vehicles in the streets of Amman. The PLO forces in Jordan carried weapons in the street and began to take over the country, setting up roadblocks, collecting tribute, and meting out punishment. As the Hashemite Kingdom tottered, al-Masri became an important bridge between his friends Arafat and King Hussein. He remembers visiting Arafat, where he was holed up in a bunker on top of a mountain at the end of the failed Palestinian revolt that became known as Black September, surrounded by 6,000 or 7,000 Jordanian troops.

"It was a nice day, but he always wants to make it dramatic, Arafat," al-Masri says, with a forgiving wave of his hand. "He wants to take us down to the bunker. It stinks, it's smelly, dark. I said, 'Come on'—he made his point. He took us down anyway. He made us cry about how bad it was for the Palestinians. He said the Jordanian army went to Palestinian houses and they were killing the men and doing things to the women. Of course, when we went down the mountain, the first Jordanian soldier we saw said you did this and that to us, and now you Palestinians will have the gun."

Arafat refused al-Masri's invitation to meet with the king at Amman. Instead he went to Lebanon. Wasfi al-Tal was assassinated shortly after by members of Black September, the Fatah terrorist group that was created to avenge the Palestinian defeat in Jordan. His assassins shot him in a hotel lobby in Cairo; one of them got down on his hands and knees and lapped at Tal's blood.

"No doubt Arafat was a great man," al-Masri says. "No doubt he had vision. Most of the people that you see now being very important, I see them wanting the grace of Yasir Arafat. They want to be in his grace. Ah, he thought money was power," al-Masri adds, with a wistful glance around his study. The money he spent to buy the loyalty of his court, al-Masri gently suggests, could easily have paid for a functioning Palestinian state instead.

"With three hundred, four hundred million dollars we could have built Palestine in ten years. Waste, waste, waste. I flew over the West Bank in a helicopter with Arafat at the beginning of Oslo, and I told him how easy we could make five, six, seven towns here; we could absorb a lot of people here; and have the right of return for the refugees. If you have good intentions and you say you want to reach a solution, we could do it. I said, if you have money and water, it could be comparable to Israel, this piece of land."

Al-Masri's eyes mist over. "Abu Ammar, yes. He's a simple man. He slept on a simple bed. He doesn't want any houses. He doesn't want anything. I remember one day I wanted to bring him some free suits, tailor-made suits, you know, and he said no, no, no. I can't. But he gave me a suit. He told me, 'This is my suit. You make it longer, you wear it and have it.' Be very interesting for you to see."

"Let's go eat," he says, beckoning me to join him. We eat at the table in his kitchen, which is adjacent to his grand house.

Halfway through lunch an aide brings down the suit, one of the famous military tunics that Arafat's guards bought at surplus stores. The brass buttons are decorated with the Fatah eagle. I check the inside of the jacket for a tailor's label, and find there is none. "Who would dare?" al-Masri explains.

"Put it on," he urges me. I put on the jacket, and find that Arafat was approximately my size, with slightly narrower shoulders. One of the inner pockets closes with a zipper.

"He kept money inside," al-Masri says. I suggest that it is strange to think that Arafat managed the affairs of his people from the inside pocket of this coat.

Al-Masri remembers sitting with Arafat one night in 1988 as the Palestinian leader negotiated a formula that would allow the United States to recognize the PLO. "They gave him the formula, and he said it in a speech in Geneva, but he put in extra words, so no one could figure out what he was saying," al-Masri remembers. "The Americans said, 'No way.' So I stayed up all night with him and Dick Murphy, the assistant secretary of state, to work out what he must say. The formula was 'We totally and absolutely renounce all forms of terrorism.' So they called a press conference, and he said everything right, except instead of 'terrorism' he said, 'We announce tourism! We announce all forms of tourism!'"

Talk of Arafat's last illness makes al-Masri sad again. "Every morning I used to go see him and give him the medicine because he would not take it from anybody else," he remembers, looking moodily out over his lawn.

"Yeah, and I never thought he would die."

"How long did you know that he was sick?" I ask.

"For the last year. Last year in September he told me he doesn't feel well. So, and he felt that something was not right, and it looks like he had the same symptoms again, but the last time he had enough immunity. Yeah, he knew."

I am struck by al-Masri's use of the word "immunity," which is a word characteristically associated with aids. Rumors that Arafat died of "a shameful illness" spread quickly through the West Bank and Gaza. Arafat, who married his wife, Suha, in 1990, was often surrounded by children and was openly affectionate with some of his bodyguards. The Palestinian leadership denounced reports that Arafat was a homosexual as lies spread by Mossad, the Israeli foreign-intelligence agency. Accounts also circulated that a secret agreement had been reached between the Israelis and Arafat's heirs, stipulating that the truth about Arafat's fatal illness would not be released, the Palestinian leader would be buried in Ramallah and not in Jerusalem, and the wanted men who had accompanied him in his captivity would not be pursued by Israeli forces.

"He knew that it was the same disease that he had a year ago?" I ask. Al-Masri nods his head.

"Same symptoms," he answers. "But look how strong he was. I mean, when Abu Mazen came," he says, referring to Arafat's longtime deputy, Mahmoud Abbas, "we brought him from one bed in his small room to a bigger room where we could sit. I sat on the bed. Abu Mazen sat in front of him and Abu Alaa sat in front of him. He said, 'Ah, Mazen.' His face was very red, and you know that he was very sick, but he wants to show that he was still in control of the details with Mazen, you know? He said, 'I have this flu, ah, ah. I have this flu. Came and went to my stomach.'"

The Old Man's Pockets

Along the outer walls of the Muqata guards lounge beneath tattered posters of the white-bearded lunatic figure that Abu Ammar became in the last years of his life. His people accepted his foibles because he was their father. He named them. He paid for their weddings and their funerals. It was part of his paternal pose that no Palestinian who asked him for money went away empty-handed. When he visited cities, he was followed by an aide with a Samsonite briefcase stuffed with bundles of cash, which he distributed to the people who lined up to beg for money. Ordinary Palestinians placed classified advertisements in the newspaper asking Arafat for money. Others wrote him letters. "I sent him a letter on the occasion of the wedding of my second daughter," a qahwehgee, or "coffee guy," who works outside the Muqata tells me one afternoon, as he fills a small cup with hot black coffee from a large brass boiler. He indicates with a nod that the Old Man was generous.

Such generosity was a common feature of Arafat's rule. Documents taken by the Israeli army from the Muqata paint an astonishing portrait of the range of requests to which Arafat routinely responded with cash. The captured documents record requests for school fees for poor children in Gaza (Arafat gave them \$250 each) and \$34,000 in tuition and expenses for the daughters of a PLO official to study in Britain ("\$10,000 is to be paid"). Though Arafat routinely cut his bequests to ordinary Palestinians to half or a third of what was asked, no such economies were inflicted on the petitions of his top officials. When one member of Arafat's circle requested money for the purchase of paintings of Mecca and Medina intended as gifts for a lady friend, Arafat was glad to oblige ("The two pictures should be paid—66 thousand dollars").

Members of the presidential guard got more money than they asked for. When Lieutenant Mahfoudh Aissa asked for plane tickets for his wife and four children to visit his sick mother-in-law in Tunis, Arafat approved the request, adding, "The tickets are to be paid for and an additional \$1,000 for expenses." He then forwarded it as usual to the Ministry of Finance, which served through most of his reign as the Palestinian leader's personal cashbox.

For those at the top of the heap the rewards were much larger and more systematic. The amounts of money stolen from the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian people through the corrupt practices of Arafat's inner circle are so staggeringly large that they may exceed one half of the total of \$7 billion in foreign aid contributed to the Palestinian Authority. The biggest thief was Arafat himself. The International Monetary Fund has conservatively estimated that from 1995 to 2000 Arafat diverted \$900 million from Palestinian Authority coffers, an amount that did not include the money that he and his family siphoned off through such secondary means as no-bid contracts, kickbacks, and rake-offs. A secret report prepared by an official Palestinian Authority committee headed by Arafat's cousin concluded that in 1996 alone, \$326 million, or 43 percent of the state budget, had been embezzled, and that another \$94 million, or 12.5 percent of the budget, went to the president's office, where it was spent at Arafat's personal discretion. An additional 35 percent of the budget went to pay for the security services, leaving a total of \$73 million, or 9.5 percent of the budget, to be spent on the needs of the population of the West Bank and Gaza. The financial resources of the PLO, which may have amounted to somewhere between one and two billion dollars, were never included in the PA budget. Arafat hid his personal stash, estimated at \$1 billion to \$3 billion, in more than 200 separate bank accounts around the world, the majority of which have been uncovered since his death.

Contrary to the comic-book habits of some Third World leaders, such as President Mobutu Sese Seko, of Zaire, and Saddam Hussein, Arafat eschewed lurid displays of wealth. His corruption was of a more sober-minded type. He was a connoisseur of power, who used the money that he stole to buy influence, to provoke or defuse conspiracies, to pay gunmen, and to collect hangers-on the way other men collect stamps or butterflies. Arafat had several advisers who oversaw the system of patronage and theft, which was convincingly outlined in a series of investigative articles by Ronen Bergman that appeared during the late

1990s in the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz. The PLO treasurer, Nizar Abu Ghazaleh, ran the company al-Bahr ("the Sea") for a small number of wealthy shareholders, including Arafat's wife, Suha. Al-Bahr set the price of a ton of cement in Gaza at \$74, of which \$17 went into Arafat's private bank account. One of Arafat's favorite bagmen, Harbi Sarsour, ran the General Petroleum Company, which established a monopoly over all the gasoline and fuel-oil products sold in the West Bank and Gaza. A company called al-Sakhra ("the Rock"), run by Fuad Shubaki on behalf of Fatah, profited hugely from an exclusive contract to provide all uniforms and other supplies to the Palestinian security forces. Official monopolies on basic goods and services had exclusive suppliers on the Israeli side. These profitable contracts were made available by Arafat to companies associated with former high-ranking members of the Israeli civil administration and the security services in the West Bank and Gaza.

The genius behind this system was Muhammad Rachid, who became Arafat's closest economic adviser. A onetime protégé of Abu Jihad, Rachid was a former magazine editor who became involved in the diamond business. He came to Arafat's attention because of his keen talent as a businessman, and because he was an ethnic Kurd—which meant that he was safely removed from the family- and clan-based politics that always threatened to disrupt the division of the spoils.

In their cities and villages Palestinians were subject to the extortion and violence of Arafat's overlapping security services, which competed among themselves for payoffs, arbitrarily arrested people and seized their land, and forced citizens to pay double or triple the price for everything from flour and gasoline to cigarettes, razor blades, and sheep feed. The fact that nearly everyone in Palestinian political life had taken something directly from Arafat's hand made it hard to criticize him; it was easier to go along. In 1991, at the low point of Fatah's finances, Ali Shahin, one of Arafat's earliest allies, wrote a secret report lambasting Fatah's "inconceivable moral degradation," for which he blamed the excesses of a leader whose true interests were "the red carpet, the private plane of the President, free rein to spend money." Shahin became the minister of supplies in Arafat's government and was notorious for selling spoiled flour and making truckloads of chocolates sit at the Erez checkpoint in the heat in order to help out a friend who owned the only candy factory in Gaza. The economy of the Palestinian territories, which had enjoyed startlingly high growth rates after 1967, when it passed from Jordanian and Egyptian control into the hands of the Israelis, stagnated and then went backward. In less than a decade Yasir Arafat and his clique managed to squander not only the economic well-being but also the considerable moral capital amassed by the Palestinian people during two and a half decades of Israeli military rule.

The Sorcerer's Apprentices

As the Oslo peace process collapsed into violence, an Israeli investment adviser named Ozrad Lev had a falling-out with his business partner, Yossi Ginossar. The two men had formed a company together and worked closely with Muhammad Rachid. Angry at both men, Lev came forward and spoke to the Israeli newspaper Ma'ariv about his own role in laundering hundreds of millions of dollars stolen by Yasir Arafat from the Palestinian people with the connivance of the Israeli government and international authorities. The story he told placed an exclamation point at the end of a decade of official lies and flagrant corruption which were justified in the name of peace. A former Israeli military-intelligence officer, Lev had left the army in 1987 and gotten a business degree from Pepperdine University, in California. In 1997 he was approached by Ginossar, a former deputy director of Shin Bet, Israel's feared domestic-security service, who had retired in disgrace after participating in a cover-up of the murder of two Palestinian teenagers who hijacked a bus with plastic guns. A charismatic figure who spoke fluent, idiomatic Arabic, Ginossar was famous for his brutal manner toward people who displeased him. He met Arafat in the early 1990s and later helped an Israeli company called Dor win an exclusive contract to supply gasoline to the Palestinian Authority. Ginossar set up a meeting between Lev and Rachid, who was looking to find a safe home in Switzerland for hundreds of millions of dollars that he had extracted from the Palestinian economy.

Licensed by a codicil to the Oslo Accords known as the Paris protocol—the agreement that established tax, customs, and other formal economic arrangements between the Palestinian Authority and the State of Israel—such corruption was held by all but the most far-out critics of Arafat's rule to be essential to the Oslo process. Every month the Israeli government was obliged to forward the VAT and other tax revenues collected on goods and services in the West Bank and Gaza to the Palestinian Authority. According to a side agreement reached between the Israeli government and Arafat, who was represented by Rachid, fuel-tax revenues were deposited in Arafat's private account #80-219000 at the Hashmonaim Street branch of Bank Leumi, in Tel Aviv. Arafat and Rachid also diverted funds to a special account at the Arab Bank in Ramallah. Every month up through the beginning of the intifada the Israeli government transferred millions of dollars to the man whom it had denounced for four decades as the world's most dangerous terrorist.

Ben Caspit broke the story that became known in Israel as "the Ginossar Affair" in December of 2002. The reporter was a friend of Lev's from childhood and had known Ginossar for years. "He was a very interesting guy, very tough, very bad manners," Caspit remembers, when I meet with him one morning in Tel Aviv. "You could sit with Yossi in the fanciest restaurant and he would start yelling at the waitress like she just killed her youngest son," Caspit recalls. "But he knew how to make himself contacts."

As I sit with Caspit on the wooden boardwalk outside Yama, a bohemian hangout in the port section of the city, the claustrophobia of the West Bank feels very far away. Here you can listen to Hebrew reggae and smell the salty sea air. A rusted steel cargo crane broods over the man-made inlet, where an old motorboat has been pulled up onto the shore. The wild party

scene in the warehouses on the weekends rivals that of Reykjavik in the winter, Caspit insists. If this is not exactly the Zionist dream of Israel's ascetic socialist founders, it speaks to the escapist desires of a secular Israeli society that has seen its dream of peace with the Arabs wither on the vine, and has become inured to flagrant official corruption.

The man that Arafat called "Joe" was the Palestinian leader's all-purpose back channel to the Israeli political leadership. He was also a lover of the good life, who smoked Cuban cigars and drove showy, expensive cars, and whose enthusiastic eating habits helped to finance Tel Aviv's proliferation of fancy restaurants. It made sense that the Palestinian leader would seek out someone like Ginossar. "Israel is a crazy place—one day you have one government, the next another," Caspit explains. "Ginossar is there all the time, and he has the ability to be close with Rabin, Peres, Barak, Sharon, with everyone."

There were those who saw Ginossar's proximity to Arafat and Rachid in a more troubling light. The former head of the civil administration in Gaza, a brigadier general named Yitzhak Segev, wrote to Barak in the fall of 1999 and warned that Ginossar's business dealings with Rachid made him a poor choice to represent Israel. But Ginossar was so deeply enmeshed in the backroom diplomacy and business deals at the center of the Middle East peace process that it was impossible to get rid of him. His self-advertised connections to high American officials such as Dennis Ross and Ambassador Martin Indyk were augmented by his lucrative business dealings with Stephen P. Cohen, a Harvard Ph.D. and sometime university professor who jetted around the Middle East in a private plane provided by the SlimFast diet mogul Daniel Abraham. When Ginossar was excluded from the Israeli delegation to the Camp David peace talks in 2000 as a security risk, he was quickly named a member of the American delegation instead.

What Ozrad Lev had to offer Ginossar and Rachid was a connection to the world of high-toned Swiss banks, which might have been leery of accepting deposits from a man once numbered among the world's leading terrorists. An investment account that belonged to the Palestinian Authority and was managed by a former Israeli intelligence officer presented fewer difficulties. Lev's first move was to establish a financial-management company named Ledbury and open an investment account at the Swiss bank Lombard Odier, at 11 Rue de la Corraterie, in Geneva, through the offices of a partner named Richard de Tscharner. On May 17, 1997, Rachid wrote a formal letter to de Tscharner establishing the account, whose funds would be derived from "Taxes and Customs revenues" and also from "Revenues derived from various economic activity of the Palestinian Authority, through its state-owned companies." Rachid also promised that the PA would not use Ledbury funds "for any war or aggression oriented activities," a commitment that might have given a more-cautious banker pause. De Tscharner agreed to set up the account on the spot.

From 1997 to 2000 the sum in the Ledbury portfolio grew to more than \$300 million. Lev also agreed to create an investment fund for leading members of the Palestinian security apparatus, which was registered on the Isle of Man under the name Supra-din—a pun on "Saladin." Management commissions for the fund were paid to Rachid's deputy, Walid Najab, through a company called MCS, which forwarded a commission to Ginossar and Lev through a company that the two men had set up in Tel Aviv under the name ARK, a Hebrew acronym for "Anachnu Rotzim Kesef"—"We Want Money."

These days Ozrad Lev spends lots of time in a restaurant in Ramat Hasharon called Reviva and Celia, which might pass for a cool screenwriters' hangout in Santa Monica. Lev himself is very Californian, in a green polo shirt and close-cut hair. He got to know Ginossar in the early 1980s, while serving in Israel's military intelligence, Aman. He remembers Ginossar as a brilliant but forbidding figure. Later, while serving as aide-de-camp to General Ehud Barak, then the head of Aman, Lev was at the scene of the Bus 300 hijacking, which destroyed Ginossar's career in Shin Bet. Ginossar's life after that was a long series of failures until he met Muhammad Rachid.

"Every place he went, he failed," Lev remembers. "One day in 1996 he told me, 'Ozrad, I've been waiting for this a long time. You have to meet Muhammad Rachid.' I said, 'Okay, who is Muhammad Rachid?' He said, 'Look, Muhammad Rachid is someone who I know will like you very much and you will like him.'" Rachid made a strong impression on the former Israeli officer.

"He understood the Israeli mentality head and shoulders above any of the Palestinians I've ever met," Lev remembers. "He was very calm, not arrogant, calculating every word that came out of his mouth, and he had an excellent sense of humor. Physically he was very Israeli. I looked at him and I felt as if I had seen this guy dozens of times on the street in Tel Aviv."

Anxious to cover himself in the event that the peace process collapsed, Lev insisted that the money in the Swiss account stay put for five years, and that withdrawals be made only to a heavily monitored Palestinian Authority account at the Arab Bank branch in Ramallah. Starting with \$16 million, Rachid funneled tens of millions of dollars to Lev, who took the deposits to Switzerland. Returns were excellent. Arafat was grateful. In July of 1997 Lev was invited to meet Arafat, who presented him with a model of the al-Aqsa mosque made of seashells from Gaza. He found the Palestinian leader to be humble and charming, and well informed about the Swiss accounts.

"He knew about all the details," Lev remembers. "When he talks to you, the sentences are so simple, so clear, which means that he is very smart. He knew that there were several accounts; he talked to me about the other names—Soditic and Atlas. He told me that he appreciates very much what I'm doing for the Palestinian people, and that he hoped many Israelis would go my

way." The only thing that disconcerted him about the meeting, Lev says, was how ugly Arafat was. Arafat's hands, he noticed, were as pale as the hands of a corpse.

"Arafat, when you met him, he was not a corrupt person," Lev says. "He lived on five shekels a day. He had a plan. Oslo was not his plan. The whole thing about the secret accounts is to keep the financial flexibility to move money to the second stage. He thought that demographically they're going to win the war, and in order to do that, you have to be patient and let the Israelis bleed."

"He succeeded in everything," Lev concludes. "Our life philosophy here is impatience—because of the Holocaust, because of the military threats. In Israel we say that when we have sex we do it with sneakers on, so that we can run to our friends and tell them how it was. The Arabs have a word, tsumut—which means holding to the ground where your ancestors lived. My ancestors are from Germany," he adds. "I don't understand the meaning of tsumut. You know, Rachid and I went to the promenade once in Tel Aviv, and he said, 'I told Arafat many times, the Israelis are their own worst enemies. We don't have to shoot one bullet—just be patient, don't have any agreement with them, and all of what you see here will be ours.'"

On June 19, 2000, after a dispute about the division of the spoils, Rachid terminated Lev's authority over the account and removed the financial controls that Lev had insisted on. Three months later the second intifada began. In August of 2001 tens of millions began flowing out of the Lombard Odier accounts. By December of 2001 a decision was reached to close the accounts. The money made its way to banks around the world, including accounts controlled by Rachid in London and Cairo.

The Inner Circle

The Oslo Accords created something called the Palestinian Authority, but to this day there really is no such thing. The assertion that the Palestinian Authority does not exist may seem strange to Western ears, because honorifics such as "President Yasir Arafat" and "Foreign Minister Nabil Shaath" have been employed so often over the past ten years that it is hard for all but the most devilish skeptics not to assume the existence of a state apparatus roughly equivalent to that which operates in the United States or in Western Europe. Instead what exists on the ground is a vast and scattered archipelago of randomly located government ministries, competing security-services headquarters, and prisons that operate according to no coordinated plan. In the slow-moving offices of the major ministries, located in the al-Tiri district of Ramallah, you can find the murafiqoon of the dead leader—his companions of the last four decades, the veterans of the legendary victories and defeats and thousands of late-night meetings and press conferences. The one constant among the crystal eagles, EU paperweights, inlaid mother-of-pearl clocks from Syria, and other mementoes of their travels is the standard-issue high-definition photograph of the golden-domed Mosque of Omar, in Jerusalem, set against a cloudless blue sky.

Having known and trusted him for so long, Arafat's companions found it impossible not to believe that with one roll of the dice, the Old Man would reverse his fortunes and escape from the morass of petty administrative details and large-scale corruption that had come to characterize his rule. The Fatah men who had been his equals and trusted advisers over the years, and had the revolutionary credentials to stand up to him, like Abu Jihad, engineer of the Palestinian uprising against Israeli rule in the late 1980s, which became known as the "intifada," and Abu Iyad, the organizational boss of the Black September terrorist group, were assassinated before the Oslo process began. Having buried his peers and survived repeated assassination attempts himself, Arafat was no longer first among equals. His was the only opinion that mattered in Palestine. Arafat's fantasy life and his money gripped the vital organs of the Palestinian national movement for so long that practical political thinking became impossible.

As the identification of Yasir Arafat with the Palestinian national movement became fixed in stone with the signing of the Oslo Accords, those members of the international diplomatic community who saw Oslo as a great moral and political achievement felt themselves to be correspondingly obliged to excuse the Palestinian leader's most outrageous statements and actions as the quirks of a man who had dedicated himself to peace.

Not everyone was convinced by the hopeful fiction that Arafat was the Middle East's answer to Nelson Mandela. Young Palestinian revolutionaries soon had a closer look at the leader they had helped to bring back from exile. The Arafat they had worshipped from afar during the seventies and eighties was a visionary ascetic—the imaginative projection of brave and frightened Palestinians, most of whom were barely out of their teens, who conjured up the heroic leader they needed from radio broadcasts and clandestine texts that were passed from hand to hand and studied like pages of the Koran. The sight of the high-handed autocrat and his potbellied retinue in the flesh came as a shock to many young Palestinians, few of whom had ever ventured outside the West Bank, Gaza, and Israel.

Young Fatah cadres in the West Bank and Gaza soon found that the corruption of their elders was matched by a complete lack of positive ideas—however farfetched or loony—about the form that a future Palestinian polity might take. There would be no Year Zero of the Palestinian revolution. Western-style parliamentary institutions did exist but had little power. What followed Arafat's return to Palestine was a decade-long thieves' banquet at which Fatah's old guard divided up the spoils of Oslo and treated ordinary Palestinians as conquered subjects. When the second intifada, popularly known as the al-Aqsa intifada, started, the members of the young guard, most of whom were now firmly anchored in middle age, rallied around the Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti—whose fiery denunciations of official corruption had led to frequent clashes with Arafat—in the hope that violence would serve as a catalyst for change. Here again, the young guard of Fatah would become little more than cannon

fodder for their elders; Barghouti was arrested by the Israelis in 2002, during Operation Defensive Shield, for masterminding terror attacks, and was sentenced to five consecutive life terms in prison.

In the cafés and apartments in Ramallah where we met, some of the leading members of Fatah's young guard spoke openly of their anger and disappointment at what had happened in Palestine since Oslo. They reserved their bitterest denunciations not for the Israelis but for Arafat's cronies, who had used state jobs to get rich, and showed little interest in their revolutionary progeny. "We remember their songs, their poems, their speeches, their beliefs, their thoughts, the names of their kids, even the number of their shoes," Ziad Abu Ain, one of Barghouti's closest friends, told me one afternoon, as we sat and talked in his apartment in Ramallah. "They don't even remember our names."

For the members of the old guard questions about how a few million Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza were to be governed were not of any particular interest. The Palestinian question was part of the larger pan-Arab discourse that had occupied the Nasserite and anti-colonialist study groups of their student days in Cairo, Damascus, and Beirut. As the symbolic leader of the Palestinian people, Yasir Arafat was the incarnation of a revolution that presented itself as a model for the rest of the Arab world—a symbol of secular revolutionary purity and anti-colonial zeal that had been supplanted in the eighties by the success of the Iranian revolution, the Sunni fundamentalist jihad against the Soviets in Afghanistan, and Hizbollah's war against the Israelis in Lebanon.

The predominant note in the old guard's reminiscences of their leader is nostalgia for the sense of the historical centrality of the Palestinian national struggle that Arafat provided, which was as addictive to his followers as any drug. Arafat's longtime foreign minister, Nabil Shaath, was thirteen years old when he first heard the young Arafat asking his father for donations to help Palestinian refugees in Cairo and Alexandria. Even then, he says, he recognized the future president of Palestine. As a guerrilla leader in the sixties and seventies, Arafat led his fighters in battle; he gave them the noms de guerre that they would carry with them for the rest of their lives.

Bereft of the man that many of them regarded as their father, Arafat's companions still live by their dead leader's schedule, staying up late at night like aging bohemians. At Fatah headquarters in Ramallah, which I visit several nights a week with N., it is easy to find the ancient champions of the revolution chain-smoking cigarettes and drinking endless little cups of black coffee. The building looks like a plush union hall in New Jersey, with green-marble floors and bluish clouds of smoke that asphyxiate the potted plants. Men in black-leather coats and heavy sweaters lounge away their evenings on padded leather couches.

The new leader, Mahmoud Abbas, lacks the Old Man's personal touch, they complain. He doesn't remember birthdays and weddings, and no one comes to him to resolve personal disputes. Some of the Old Man's inner circle have already sent their families to Amman or Tunis and their money to London or Cairo.

Upstairs I meet Ahmad Abdul Rahman, the former head of Arafat's propaganda operations, who sits in his navy pea coat smoking Dunhills with their gold band, a revolutionary's privilege. His glossy jet-black hair and dark eyebrows contrast sharply with his deeply lined smoker's face. Abdul Rahman was close to Arafat for almost forty years, and frequently issued statements in the Old Man's name.

"It is because of Arafat that we stayed together for this long, long time," he explains. "He invents events if there are no events. He invents activities if there are no activities."

"Did his style of working change from Beirut to Tunis to Ramallah?" I ask.

"He faced new problems here," Abdul Rahman concedes. "If he was told 'This ministry does not need people, it is filled,' he'd say, 'Okay' and then create another ministry. In this way he built the main basis for the state."

The marble-floored Palestine Media Center is by far the snazziest government ministry in Ramallah. It is run by the veteran propagandist Yasir Abd Rabbo, who looks like a ladies' man at a red-brick college in Manchester or Leeds and walks with a limp that he claims is the result of an old war wound. An inveterate "splittist," who joined and left a long list of secular leftist Palestinian parties, he is a charter member of the Arafatist bloc. He is also a habitual gossip. He knows N. well, and is happy to grant us an interview. Like many of the men I talk to, he speaks of the late Palestinian leader in the present tense.

"Arafat's great secret is patience," Abd Rabbo explains, of the man he served for more than three decades. "He does not cut even a thread to a fly. He keeps lines open with everybody. He is Arafat the progressive, Arafat the Islamist, Arafat the conservative, and Arafat the enlightened. So he was with the Saudi kings and with the kings of the Kremlin at the same time, with Fidel Castro and all kinds of imams and the pope. The one main issue he did not compromise in his life was the independence of the Palestinian movement. He believed since the beginning that if he did not preserve the independence of the Palestinian movement from the other Arab regimes, he will be doomed."

Abd Rabbo's area of particular expertise in the 1970s was the politics of the European left and the Soviet bloc. A table near his desk shows off a laughing Buddha, a crystal eagle, and a photo book titled *Russia: The Country of Vast Expanses*. He explains to me how Arafat patiently led the Palestinian national movement up the ladder to the inner halls of the Kremlin. His goal was the near-hallucinatory possibility of state sponsorship by one of the two reigning Cold War superpowers. After the October War of 1973, which began Egypt's migration into the American camp, Arafat's dream of Soviet sponsorship became a reality.

"We started to meet Brezhnev, we started to meet Andropov, Chernenko, and the others. Of course, Arafat is always trying to give the impression that he is—"

"A Marxist?" I wonder out loud.

"No, never, never, never," Abd Rabbo answers, appalled. "That he is so independent, that he is Arafat the Palestinian, the nationalist, the Muslim who is building relations with Moscow. I remember in one of the first visits, suddenly, I don't know why—but I understand why—he wanted to pray the noon prayers inside the Kremlin. We were begging him, 'Don't do that, postpone it, God will permit you. There is no access to God here.' He got down on his knees in the middle of the room, on the carpet, and he bowed down to Mecca and he said his prayers. This was also a message to the Saudis, you see—I am Arafat, the Muslim, and I built these relations with the Soviet Union."

Arafat's defiant behavior toward the Soviets in the seventies and eighties mirrored exactly the tantrums that would puzzle and intimidate Western diplomats in the nineties. When I ask Abd Rabbo if any of the Soviet leaders had Arafat's number, he nods.

"Andropov," he answers, smiling ever so slightly at the memory of the legendary KGB spymaster who became premier of the Soviet Union for a short time in the early 1980s. When the Palestinians met with Andropov, in 1982, he seemed old and frail and appeared to doze off. "And Arafat took his time explaining everything, going from one continent to another, to the seventh sky and down, talking about everything that he had in his mind. He talked about how he had defeated the Israeli army, and how he had developed his own weapons factories, and how he made anti-tank missiles from his own secret designs. And in the middle of his—let's call them flights of fancy—Andropov raised his head up and told him, 'Chairman Arafat, let's stop it now.' So Arafat stopped talking nonsense and started talking politics."

Mamduh Nofal is the former military commander of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the commander of the Palestinian forces during the siege of Beirut. A peculiarly Palestinian amalgam of poet, op-ed writer, and guerrilla fighter, he is an imposing hulk of a man, at once friendly and fierce, like a pirate in a storybook. At the battle of Karamah, in Jordan, in 1968, Nofal was a military leader for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). It was there that he began his relationship with Arafat, he tells me when we meet in his modern office in Ramallah. The sign outside his office identifies him as a high-ranking official of Fatah.

"With the fighters, he lived with them as they lived. He sat with them on the ground. He brought food for them and fed them. This is not propaganda."

Nofal tells me that Arafat's strategic use of violence after Oslo began with permitting Hamas and Islamic Jihad to launch terror attacks. Arafat would then crack down on those same organizations to show that he was in control. Nofal first heard Arafat give orders that led directly to violence, he says, before the riots that erupted over the excavation of the Hasmonean tunnel, near the Haram al-Sharif, in 1996. Nofal says that the impetus for the violence was the statement by the newly elected Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, that he would not speak to Arafat directly. Arafat was furious at the slight.

"I was with him in his office," Nofal recalls. "He got up and walked around the desk. He was very, very angry. Finally he calmed down a bit and he pointed to the phone on his desk. He said, 'I will make Netanyahu call me on this phone.'"

Arafat ordered demonstrators into the streets, and told them to provoke the Israelis. When violence erupted, the Israelis were blamed. "I was sitting with him again when the phone on his desk rang, and he looked at me and said, 'It's Netanyahu.' And it was him."

The second intifada also began with the intention of provoking the Israelis and subjecting them to diplomatic pressure. Only this time Arafat went for broke. As a member of the High Security Council of Fatah, the key decision-making and organizational body that dealt with military questions at the beginning of the intifada, Nofal has firsthand knowledge of Arafat's intentions and decisions during the months before and after Camp David. "He told us, 'Now we are going to the fight, so we must be ready,'" Nofal remembers. Nofal says that when Barak did not prevent Ariel Sharon from making his controversial visit to the plaza in front of al-Aqsa, the mosque that was built on the site of the ancient Jewish temples, Arafat said, "Okay, it's time to work."

When it became clear that Ariel Sharon, then the Israeli opposition leader, would win the Israeli elections in February of 2001, Nofal went to Arafat and urged him to call off the intifada. "There were a lot of people sitting around, including Saeb Erekat and Yasir Abd Rabbo," Nofal remembers.

"I told him, 'Abu Ammar, I need the security to speak openly.' The Bedouin say, 'Give me the security to speak freely.' He said to me, 'Speak.'

"I said to him, 'Abu Ammar, Barak will lose, Sharon is coming, the military work is not our field. It is Sharon's field. He needs it. So please, Abu Ammar, let us go out from this field, and leave Sharon as the hayawan muftaris [the flesh-eating animal] to play alone.'"

"Those who were sitting around Arafat, they said, 'Ah, you are afraid of Sharon!'" Nofal recalls, shaking his head. "Sharon will not stay in power. Barak stayed eighteen months. Sharon will stay nine. And if we conquer him, this is the last bullet in the Israeli gun!" They said, 'So, khalas [enough already]—why are you afraid?' I said, 'I am afraid that he will destroy us in these nine months, and I doubt that he will fail.' At that time Arafat kept silent. He was listening. But most of those around opposed what I said."

"And I think Saudi Arabia also played a role in Arafat's decision to keep the intifada going," Nofal says, agreeing with a similar analysis presented to me by Abd Rabbo. "Clinton put his initiative on the table on the eighteenth of December, after three months of intifada. Arafat visited Saudi Arabia. At that time the Saudi Arabian leadership told him, 'Wait, don't give this card to Clinton. Clinton is going, Bush is coming. Bush is the son of our friend. We will get more for you from him.' Then we discovered that Saudi Arabia couldn't do anything, that it is not a matter of personal issues or friendship. And Sharon succeeded very well, and put us in a corner."

Later that evening I meet Nasser al-Kidwa, Arafat's nephew and the new Palestinian foreign minister, in the lobby of the Grand Park Hotel in Ramallah, a regular hangout for the new Palestinian elite. Men sit on pastel-suede lounge furniture and smoke cigarettes beneath a fresco of smirking putti holding a swaggered cloth. Al-Kidwa has little time for frivolities. With his round face and small features, short arms, and tiny fingers, there is something disconcertingly fetal and half-formed about his physicality. Family was never important to him or to his uncle, he tells me. All that mattered was the success of the cause. He invites me up to his bare hotel room, where he informs me about the contents of his uncle's medical files.

"The funny thing is, I brought them to New York, and then brought them back to Gaza, and then from Gaza to Ramallah," al-Kidwa remembers of the large binder—500-plus pages, with tabs of several colors, containing x-rays and medical charts—that he was given by the French authorities. "No one believed they are in my damn suitcase, including the Israelis. I just passed through the checkpoint without telling anybody anything."

When I ask him whether he read the files, he shakes his head. "I didn't look at them because I knew that we wouldn't find a single word that was inconsistent with what we were told," he says. "I personally think that it is probably an unnatural cause."

"So the Israelis poisoned him?" I ask.

"I can't say that, because, again, this is too serious to just be said like that," al-Kidwa answers. He understood his uncle as a great actor who took pleasure in his performances. "He succeeded in turning the cause of the refugees into the cause of the century, while his enemy is probably the strongest actor in the world, in modern history if not beyond," al-Kidwa explains, his voice falling almost to a whisper.

"That enemy being the United States?" I ask.

"No," he says. "Israel. And its supporters. The Jewish community around the world."

Even here, in Ramallah, he is careful to whisper. When I ask him to explain the achievements of his uncle's rule in the context of the Palestinian national movement, his voice returns to normal.

"He set some rules—noble, I think," al-Kidwa says. "For instance, no one will be deprived of his salary, even traitors. If you shoot at him, still your family will get your salary, and your kids will still go to school."

One Big Prison

My trips to Gaza, a teeming seaside strip of land with a distinctly Egyptian flavor, provide the most striking evidence of the economic consequences of Arafat's misrule. The Erez checkpoint, where I enter, is like a wound that has been opened and reopened. Twenty-five-foot-high sections of concrete barrier of the type that are being used for the wall in Jerusalem stand next to a sandbagged pillbox that has been reinforced with steel. A decade ago, after the first intifada, the guard post here was a white-painted wooden shack on the road. Now, past the elaborate security barriers on the Israeli side, a long, dank, tin-roofed corridor stretches toward Gaza like a passageway for cattle. At the end of the corridor is a ramshackle guard post. The Palestinian soldier at the post wears green army fatigues and a knit wool hat embroidered with the words "Top Gun." Aided by the light of a single bulb, he laboriously inscribes the passport numbers of entering visitors with a worn pencil in a spiral-bound notebook. On the wall behind him is a framed photograph of the Old Man.

To the right of the checkpoint is the Erez industrial area. One of the few tangible results of hundreds of meetings to figure out a way to help Israeli and foreign manufacturers tap the Palestinian labor market, the industrial area is nearly abandoned after a series of suicide bombings. A wet, acrid haze from untreated sewage and burning plastic hangs over Gaza during the daylight hours, and gets worse at night. The sewage-treatment plant in Beit Lahia is working at three times its normal capacity.

It takes me only two hours to travel the entire length of Gaza. My destination is the city of Rafah, which lies half on the Israeli side and half on the Egyptian side of the border. Rafah is a tropical place with famous hothouses that grow flowers for export and excellent vegetables. Egyptian flags fly above the high wall that marks the border, which is a magnet for smugglers. Israeli raids to stop the contraband have turned the neighborhoods of Rafah nearest the border into a moonscape of shattered concrete. It is easy to see why Rafah has become a byword for the misery of the Palestinian people since the beginning of the intifada.

Said Zourub, the mayor of Rafah, is a middle-aged man with a handsome black moustache, who is wearing a black turtleneck in the 90° heat. Riding in his Ford Explorer, we stop frequently as groups of men warn of an incursion by an Israeli armored unit. Rounding the corner, we find two armored Israeli bulldozers knocking down a building that was used as cover for a smuggling tunnel.

The Rafah school is pockmarked by heavy-caliber bullets, many of which date from a memorable firefight in which the armed men of the refugee camps established positions there.

"Here was a tunnel," the mayor says, pointing to a flattened pile of rubble. On a wall nearby is English-language graffiti memorializing "Rachel who came to Rafah to protect our camp," a reference to Rachel Corrie, an American volunteer who was run over by an Israeli bulldozer in March of 2003 when she attempted to prevent a house from being demolished. Next to the graffiti about Corrie is the word "Fuck."

Zourub remembers the day when Abu Ammar made his triumphant entry into Gaza, in 1994.

"My son asks me on that day, 'Baba, why did Abu Ammar come back here?'" Zourub tells me, as we drive through the ruined streets of his city. "I tell him, 'Abu Ammar came to make things better for the people.' Now, when Abu Ammar dies, he tells me, 'Baba, you are a big liar. Abu Ammar failed to achieve anything.'"

The mayor eases his 4x4 around a corner, as if the machine can delicately sense danger. We stop, and a large group of men gather around the mayor's vehicle to complain that a tank has destroyed a manhole. A man in a tan sweater and a black jacket rides his bicycle past, followed by a man in a donkey cart.

The drive back to Gaza City takes four and a half hours. I spend the night in a luxury hotel by the beach, a short walk from the four-story multimillion-dollar villa constructed by Arafat's successor, Mahmoud Abbas, on land that was designated for use as a public park. The next morning I meet with Iyad Sarraj, a human-rights activist and the director of the leading mental-health organization in Gaza. In the 1980s, during the first intifada, many of his patients were prisoners who had been tortured by the Israelis. In the 1990s the prisoners he treated were victims of torture by the Palestinian Authority's principal militia, the Preventive Security Service. When Sarraj complained about the poor state of civil liberties under President Arafat, he was jailed three times, beaten, and tortured. A handsome secularist in his forties, he wears a black-leather motorcycle jacket and smokes constantly during our interview, which is held in his office overlooking the Mediterranean. His eyes are tired.

"Palestinians have lost the battle because of their lack of organization and because they have been captives of rhetoric and sloganeering rather than actual work," he says. "I believe that the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians in one way or the other is between development and underdevelopment, civilization and backwardness. Israel was established on the rule of law, on democratization, and certain principles that would advance Israel, while the Arabs and the Palestinians were waiting always for the prophet, for the rescuer, for the savior, the mahdi. Arafat came, and everyone hung their hats on him without realizing that there is a big gap between the rescuer and the actual work that needs to be done. This is where the Palestinians lost again the battle. They lost it in '48 because of their backwardness, ignorance, and lack of organization in how to confront the Zionist enemy. They lost it when they had the chance to build a state, because the PA was absolutely corrupt and disorganized."

Documents captured by the Israelis give a very detailed picture of the vast protection racket set up by Arafat and his henchmen to govern Gaza. At the top of the pyramid were Arafat and his inner circle. Below them were the Gaza security chief, Muhammad Dahlan, and the Gaza intelligence chief, Amin al-Hindi. Dahlan's deputy, Rashid Abu Shabak, who was responsible for terror attacks on Israelis as well as for the murder of Palestinians, controlled the Karni checkpoint, demanding exorbitant bribes for allowing goods to pass in and out of the Gaza Strip. Dahlan, Shabak, and the other heads of the Preventive Security Service apparatus profited from their joint investments with a businessman named Ihab al-Ashqar. Together they controlled the Great Arab Company for Investment and Development, which imported gravel through the Karni checkpoint; the al-Motawaset Company, which bought gravel from the Great Arab Company and made cement; and the al-Sheik Zayid construction project. Large sums of money regularly changed hands among the partners. Additional sums came directly from Arafat himself.

"To the brother the Rais, may Allah protect him," wrote Muhammad Dahlan on January 1, 2001. "Please instruct the payment of \$200,000." Arafat's reply, "Ministry of Finance: pay \$150,000," is duly noted.

The results of this system of payoffs and theft are written in the rubble fields of Rafah and on the walls and utility poles of the Jabalya refugee camp, near the Erez crossing. The flags that flutter over the camp represent the different Palestinian factions. Green is for Hamas, black for Islamic Jihad, yellow for Fatah, and red for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. A wall banner reads Hamas congratulates the Islamic nation for the al-Fitr feast. Teenage martyrs are everywhere in the camp. Their solemn, unblinking eyes stare out from commemorative posters that promise the sweetness of everlasting life and the sureness of divine vengeance.

My guide, Ismail, is twenty years old, quiet and well-spoken. With his jean jacket, gelled brown hair, sideburns, sharp nose, and olive skin, he looks like a singer in a Latin pop band. He works in a bakery, though he once dreamed of joining the Preventive Security Service. His family refused their permission. "The reputation of the Preventive Security has been destroyed by the Death Group," Ismail explains sadly, referring to the notorious unit headed by an officer named Nabil Tammuz.

As we wait by the Erez checkpoint, three kids pass us on a donkey cart, laughing and having a wonderful time as they circumvent the roadblock by going off into the fields, where cars cannot follow. "The Jeep is nothing compared to the donkey cart now!" they call out. Since the beginning of the intifada the price of a donkey-cart ride in Gaza has more than tripled.

When I ask Ismail if he ever thought of leaving this place, his watchful face goes slack, and a dreamy look comes into his eyes. "This is the wish of my life," he answers simply. As our driver inches forward, a disembodied voice orders in Hebrew, "Lachzor"—"Go back." Gunfire crackles over our heads and into the fields. After another forty-five minutes of waiting I decide to walk across the road, with a friend who has accompanied me here. We pass a thin gray line of workers coming out of the Erez industrial area—fewer than a hundred, in an area that was made for thousands—and then we stand and wait for an hour and a half or so at the Palestinian end of the checkpoint, where a gangster with huge gold-rimmed sunglasses balanced on his long nose is bringing in a shipment of cars from Israel. A heavy-caliber Israeli gun opens up over the road, pumping jackhammer bursts into the fields.

"Night fire," my companion explains. "They are keeping the barrels warm." As I trudge through the dark, echoing tunnel that leads back to Israel, I pass two Arab boys arguing over money. "You stole three shekels," one says. "I am not a thief!" his friend answers. The next evening a suicide squad attacks the guard post, and three attackers die. When I come back to Gaza, everything is the same, except for a ten-foot hole and a new pile of rubble.

The Professionals

Absent the formal police-state structure that existed in Iraq and still exists in Syria, the reality of Palestinian social and political life under Arafat can best be described not as totalitarian but, rather, as an extreme kind of political narcissism, in which millions of people were reduced to tokens in the fantasy life of the man they had been educated to think of as their father. Their willingness to follow the Old Man can be read as a measure of his charisma, his skill at manipulating people, the depth of Palestinian despair, or the larger sickness of Arab politics. Yet it is also a fact that Arafat would not have survived for longer than a few months if not for the men of the security services who planted and debriefed informers, conducted interrogations, and maintained the vast storehouses of information that were the foundation of his rule.

The new headquarters of Tawfiq Tirawi, Arafat's favorite spymaster, are located in a Palestinian Authority building in Ramallah; the sign outside proclaims an affiliation with the ministry that handles construction. The parking lot is guarded by men in uniform. I am quickly ushered inside the building, where a guard takes my passport before he lets me get on the elevator. I ascend in the company of a pair of guards, who lead me out to a floor of the building that appears to be empty. One of the guards opens a door and leads me down a hallway to an open room that is filled with women sitting at computer terminals, where I am offered a chair. A parrot chirps in the corner as a girl in careful makeup and bright hijab enters data into a brand-new computer. The spymaster's outer office is quiet and well run, and shows few signs of the goldbricking and placeholding that characterize the more public functions of the Palestinian Authority.

Tirawi's title during Arafat's lifetime was head of the General Intelligence Service in the West Bank. While the general secretary of Fatah in the West Bank, Marwan Barghouti, led the intifada in the field, Tirawi provided the professional planning and staff required to launch terror attacks that killed hundreds of Israeli civilians, and received detailed reports about the individuals and organizations involved through a network headed by his deputy, Haj Ismail Jabir.

After waiting for about half an hour, my translator and I are ushered down a long corridor, past a security door, and through a windowless conference room filled with brand-new imported office furniture still encapsulated in amniotic plastic sacs. We walk through a security door, into another empty office, and then through a second security door, which opens on to a quiet, light-filled office, where Tirawi sits at his desk and speaks softly into a cell phone. "La, la, la, la, la," he answers, nodding his head in assent.

His potbelly grown a bit larger after the years of his confinement in the Muqata, Tawfiq Tirawi is a calm, meditative presence who speaks in the unhurried, deliberative voice of a professional interrogator. He is well dressed, in expensive casual European clothes—a white-cashmere turtleneck under a tan jacket, and wool trousers that ride up over his stomach. His black hair is shot through with gray. He speaks with his hands clasped just below his sternum, over the buckle of his brown-leather Gucci belt. Abu Ammar, he explains, was an abqari, a genius, with a thirst for small details.

"He had a computer up here," he says, tapping his head with his index finger when I ask him what kinds of details his master particularly liked to know. "All the information," he says. "Including the most personal information. And not only regarding political rivals, but everybody—he will love to know this kind of personal information."

Our conversation is interrupted by the gentle ring of his cell phone, and Tirawi speaks for a while, issuing clear, simple orders. Arabic headlines scroll by in silence on a large TV set tuned to al-Jazeera. After a few minutes he turns back to our conversation. He was nineteen or twenty when he first met the Old Man, at a guerrilla base in Jordan. The Old Man had only two suits. "And he had two kaffiyas," Tirawi adds. "Sometimes he would wear the kaffiya around his neck instead, especially in winter when it was very cold. But he got used to it, so then he started wearing it on his head in winter and summer. He never wore cologne."

I ask Tirawi to describe the way that Arafat dealt with his political allies and his rivals within the Palestinian national movement.

"Many times, with the members of the executive committee, this is the impression he gave them—that he was their father, even if they were older than he was," Tirawi says. "He had those two important positions, of being the father, of embracing everybody, and gathering them around him, and then, when it came to a time of decision, he was the leader. Sometimes he would get mad at somebody, and he would say something that made them upset, and then directly, the next day, he would be coming to them, kissing them and saying that he was sorry, and giving them the impression that he was apologizing to them."

When I ask Tirawi how the second intifada started, he initially denies that Arafat was responsible. "It was a popular movement, because Israel was not respecting the agreements," Tirawi says. When I press him further, he says that there was in fact a decision to launch a war against the Israelis. "After tens of Palestinians were killed by the Israeli army—that was how it started," Tirawi says, amplifying his original statement. "There was not any use of weapons at the beginning of the intifada. Only after—even after a hundred Palestinians were killed, there was not one bullet. After that, there was a decision. But only after more than a hundred Palestinians were killed."

Having established himself in bunkerlike circumstances inside the Muqata, Arafat expressed a great deal of frustration with the lack of support he received from Arab leaders who made ritual obeisance to the justice of the Palestinian cause. "Many times he would be pushing the Arab leaders to move, not to wait, especially when he was besieged," Tirawi remembers in his mellow voice, as the sun streams through the plate-glass windows, which overlook the hills around Ramallah. "He would look at those Arab leaders with great bitterness, because they were impotent, they could not do anything."

When I ask Tirawi to name Arafat's greatest failure, he is blunt. "He failed to realize his dream and the dream of his people of establishing a state."

The members of Fatah's young guard who achieved a measure of real political power in Arafat's court were the heads of the security services in the West Bank and Gaza, Jibril Rajoub and Muhammad Dahlan. Both men had become close to Arafat in Tunis after they were deported by the Israelis during the first intifada, in the eighties. Both men forged close operational ties to the CIA during the nineties. The theory then was that the United States and Israel needed to help train and strengthen Arafat's security services, so that the Palestinian leader could crack down on Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Rajoub's relationship with the CIA came to an end in 2001, when an explosive projectile damaged the bathroom of his heavily secured compound, which the Israelis claimed was being used as a hideout for terrorists. The Israelis then demolished the compound.

Muhammad Dahlan, also known as Abu Fathi, is the crown prince of Gaza. Well-built, in his mid-forties, Dahlan has an easy, powerful physical presence that exudes authority and a not inconsiderable amount of egotism and vanity. Where Rajoub looks like a colonel in civilian clothing, Dahlan is a fawn-eyed fashion plate. His hair is crimped with a wave in front, like an Egyptian pop star's. Dahlan is widely seen as the power behind Mahmoud Abbas's government and the paramount warlord in the Palestinian territories. He is the linchpin for the Bush administration's hopes for democracy in the Palestinian Authority. When I arrive at his floor in the Grand Park Hotel in Ramallah, I am greeted by a bodyguard, who escorts me past three armed men to his room. Today Dahlan is wearing alligator loafers, a silk turtleneck, a Gucci blazer, and a large Rolex watch. Beside the couch where he sits is a stack of Arabic translations of articles from the world's major newspapers. Dahlan, who was first introduced to Arafat by Abu Jihad, in Baghdad, is pleased that I recognize his mentor's name.

"When we lost Abu Jihad, we lost the political know-how," he says. "With Abu Iyad, we lost the creativity and ability to shape opinion." Dahlan takes a sip of his tea and leans forward. "I believe that the internal life of the Palestinian national movement became much more complicated when Abu Jihad and Abu Iyad died, because we had only one person in charge," he explains.

"If you disagree with Abu Ammar, you become with the Jews. Whereas before, if you opposed Abu Ammar, it meant that you could be with Abu Jihad or Abu Iyad."

Like Rajoub, who was close to Arafat in Tunis, Dahlan was horrified by the Palestinian leadership's ignorance of the actual conditions in the territories and the nature of the Israeli state. "It was a horrible shock," he says. "They didn't know anything, nothing essential, the details or even the important aspects of the situation. Because I was used to Abu Jihad, who knew even the smallest details about who was who in this refugee camp, in that school, in this university, in Bir Zeit University, in Jabalya refugee camp, I assumed that the rest were like him. When I became in the forefront after Abu Jihad died, I realized that they knew nothing. I was astonished and I was saddened."

"Arafat is your friend, as long as you're not a threat to him, or a competitor, based on his perception," Dahlan says. In the last year of Arafat's life, he adds, the relationship between them cooled. "It's not you, it's not logic," he explains. "Sometimes he would get scared of you. He would get jealous of you. You don't know why. It would just start in his mind, from the people around him," Dahlan says, leaning forward and squirting a decongestant spray into his nose from a white-plastic bottle.

"Working with him in general is not easy, even for people like me," Dahlan continues. Echoing comments made to me by Tirawi and Rajoub, he paints a picture of a highly emotional man who was expert in manipulating those around him but was also susceptible to the manipulations of his court.

"Many times he would be like a kid," Dahlan remembers. "Sometimes he is shouting, or sobbing, and other times he is very calm. I remember him laughing when we were telling him jokes, especially when we were in the airplane together. I remember him when he was angry, especially during the elections, the negotiations, when he was planning. He had highly refined human emotions, very sensitive. He is very shy—maybe this is something that will shock you. Anytime someone was coming with any wish, he would want to fulfill it. This created problems for us."

In one case, early on in the Oslo process, Dahlan says, he remembers being alone with Arafat when Prime Minister Rabin called the Palestinian leader on the phone and asked to change a key point in the Oslo agreement. Arafat agreed on the spot.

"He thought it was the fish market," Dahlan adds.

My translator N. asks if he saw the recent editorial headline in the newspaper al-Ayyam that said "Arafat Makes Decisions From the Grave."

"That's shit and garbage," Dahlan says.

When I ask him for his final verdict on Arafat's mistakes, he is openly dismissive.

"He managed the relationship with the U.S. the way he manages relations with the Arab countries and the Third World countries," Dahlan begins. "Second, he didn't distinguish between a personal relationship and a political one." Dahlan pauses before he completes the list. "And the third thing, which is also important, he thought he was as powerful as the Jews in the U.S. He overestimated himself. In my view, my interest lies with the U.S. My duty is how to create an interest for the U.S. with me, so that they will serve me."

The Israelis

In the weeks that follow, I ditch my translators and travel to Tel Aviv for on- and off-the-record meetings with present and former high-ranking Israeli officials, including officers of various intelligence services who had dealings with Arafat. Both the Israelis and the Palestinians know their enemy well. They share other things, too, such as their taste in interior décor. During one meeting in the Kirya, the army command headquarters in the center of Tel Aviv, I notice that the view from my host's corner office is similar to the view from Tawfiq Tirawi's office. Again, the television is tuned to al-Jazeera with the sound turned off. Looking around the room, I notice a picture of the Mosque of Omar above the walls of Jerusalem. It's almost the same office, I comment to my host, who smiles apologetically. "But my view is nicer," he says. "I see the ocean."

A current high-ranking officer in the Israeli intelligence services: "Let me tell you a story. In 1997 Arafat was unhappy with Netanyahu, so in March he decided to resume what we call the green light for attacks. Since early 1996 he had the red light. So he had a meeting with the Hamas leadership, and he said something about the fact that they are always in holy war. Hamas came out of this meeting and they weren't sure if Arafat really meant for them to resume the attacks. So they asked him to give them a sign. He released from jail Ibrahim Maqadma. The story with Maqadma is that he had been in charge of the secret cell in Hamas that was in charge of getting rid of Arafat. So by releasing him, you give them a green light. On the twenty-first of March, 1997, they carried out the attack on the café in Tel Aviv. That is what we mean by the green light for terror."

A former leader of the Israeli security services who met with Arafat many times: "He accepted that in his lifetime he would not see a Palestinian state that included the land beyond the 1967 borders. 'In his lifetime' is a key phrase on our side also. We also believe that all the land is ours. If the Palestinians were weak enough, we would take Hebron and Nablus and sit there forever, because that is the biblical heartland of Israel. Arafat woke up every day and imagined what is possible today, and that is the

mark of a pragmatic person. When the intifada came, he rode the horse. I used to tell my people, just because you see a man sitting on top of the horse, it doesn't mean he is telling the horse where it should go."

Amos Gilad, the chief of Israeli military intelligence's research section during the late 1990s, who authored a classified report titled "2000, the Year of Decision—The Coming Terror War Against Israel": "He loved smoke and blood and ruins. This is where he felt most comfortable. He believed that Israel was a temporary entity. To talk about him as a pragmatic person is utter nonsense. His goal was to destroy us, and he almost succeeded. He wanted to ride on his horse up to heaven."

Former prime minister Ehud Barak is a unique figure in Israeli political life, because he is hated with equal intensity by the left and the right. Israelis hate Barak because he killed their dreams. Barak killed the dream of Greater Israel by offering to give up all of Gaza and all but a single-digit percentage of the West Bank, and to divide Jerusalem. Barak killed the dream of peace by failing to reach an agreement with the Palestinians at Camp David. The most decorated combat veteran in the history of the State of Israel, Barak is the country's prodigal son, the leader to whom it turned in 1999 with high expectations, and from whom it received the bitter harvest of the al-Aqsa intifada. The popular feeling about Barak is best summed up by a joke I saw on the Israeli sketch-comedy show *Eretz Nehederet* (A Wonderful Country). "Following the appearance of locusts this week in southern Israel," the show's anchor intoned, "experts are warning the public to be on the lookout for creatures that appear, wreak havoc, and leave quickly." The camera then cut to a picture of Barak.

I meet Barak in a Tel Aviv coffee shop called Aroma. Barak's security man arrives early, and asks me to move to another table so that he can position Barak close to an exit, with his back against a solid stone wall, facing outward. When Barak arrives, he asks me to change seats, so that he can sit facing the wall. Not yet comfortable, he props his feet up on a chair. A fluent storyteller, Barak is also a skilled classical pianist, a gifted mathematician, and an amateur mechanic who likes to relax by taking objects apart and putting them back together. His alert, inquisitive eyes and active features are set in a round face that carries the beginnings of a double chin.

There is a school of opinion that blames Arafat's personal hatred of Barak for the intifada. When I try it out on Barak, he dismisses the idea as irrational; yet as we talk, it is not hard to see why so many people find him disconcerting. Barak has two distinct and contradictory personalities. He combines the hyperactive, engaging manner of the smartest ten-year-old boy on the planet with a cold, analytical way of describing events that suggests the personality of the computer HAL in Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey. Oslo, Barak believes, was a political adventure embarked on by Rabin, who distrusted Arafat but saw a strategic need to reach a political settlement with the Palestinians.

"What we had in mind all the time was that if you keep moving toward a volcanic eruption of violence, as a result of being unable to stretch reigning over the Palestinians for another generation, we might end up with a tragedy," Barak says, tugging at the collar of his navy windbreaker. He recalls a meeting at the beginning of the first intifada, chaired by Rabin, in which the Israeli defense establishment confronted the nature of the rebellion and the range of available solutions.

"We had a closed gathering of probably thirty people—the top brass of the defense ministry—with Rabin, and he brought several academics to talk about what they believed they were seeing," Barak remembers. "The first intifada was then two weeks old. And there was a brilliant presentation made by Professor Shamir, and he talked about the fifty precedents in the last century of such events. He said that throughout history only three strategies came close to being successful. None is relevant to our case. The strategies were extermination, starvation, and mass transportation. We were targets of extermination and the Armenians also, but it didn't work. Biafra was starvation, didn't work. And he analyzed what would happen—it's a brilliant short presentation."

As chief of the IDF general staff, and later as a minister in Rabin's cabinet, Barak talked to the prime minister about the problems with the Oslo Accords very often, he says. "Many times I would ask Rabin, Why did you give up on this or that? and he would say, 'You know, Ehud, we still have wide enough margins. The moment will inevitably come when we'll have to pass our judgment.' Even at the time, we read Arafat's speeches to other audiences, in Johannesburg and other places, where he would say, 'Remember the false Hudna,'" Barak says, referring to a deceptive treaty entered into by the prophet Muhammad. By the time he became prime minister, Barak says, he found that a violent explosion was imminent and the strategic situation was not in Israel's favor.

"I felt in all my mature life that Israel from 1947 on could never materialize any operational or military achievement unless we had two preconditions fulfilled," he explains. "One, that we occupied the moral high ground in the world, the other that we kept our internal unity. It was the case in 1947 exactly because Ben-Gurion was ready to take an almost impossible international plan and agree to it, and the Palestinians rejected it. Only the fact that Ben-Gurion accepted it made it possible for Israel to hold to the results of the war for fifty-seven years."

"Eight years later we drove into Sinai," he continues, "and it took three weeks for Ben-Gurion to be thrown out after he made his messianic announcement to the Knesset about the founding of the Third Kingdom of Israel. In 1967 we opened fire but the perception in the world was that they tried to strangle us, and we enjoyed the moral high ground and internal unity. In Lebanon we violated this basic rule and we were unable to hold what we took. I felt if we did not act quite urgently to create this moment of truth before Bill Clinton left office, we will have an eruption, and Israel will be blamed."

I mention to Barak that Yigal Carmon, a former Israeli national-security adviser, and now the head of memri, a leading source of translations of Arab-language media into English, told me of meeting with Barak several times before he went to Camp David to make his historic peace offer to Arafat. Each time they met, Carmon said, Barak pressed him on whether Arafat would accept the deal. Each time, Carmon said that based on the speeches Arafat was making in Arabic, the Palestinian leader would insist that the Israelis hand over the Old City of Jerusalem to serve as the Palestinian capital.

Even for secular Israelis the idea of surrendering the historic center of Jerusalem to Arab rule was simply unthinkable. In order to defuse the strategic threat posed by the Palestinian claim to Jerusalem, the Israelis needed to stage a controlled scenario in which they would appear as peacemakers while Arafat would be bound by his own rhetoric to refuse their generous offer of a state. There could be no better master of ceremonies for such a demonstration than Bill Clinton, the American president who brought Arafat and Rabin together in 1993 on the White House lawn. By this account, at least, reports of Barak's unfriendly behavior at Camp David can be explained by the fact that the Israeli prime minister was hoping that his peace proposal would fail.

Many Israelis dismiss the idea that Barak's offer to Arafat at Camp David was part of any master plan. Still, the implication is worth considering: the prime minister of Israel used an American president to knowingly create a huge diplomatic failure that damaged the international prestige of the United States in order to extricate his country from the consequences of Oslo.

"Let me complete one point," Barak says. "Imagine two firemen who are both running to save a two-family house from a fire. The other fireman is already a distinguished one with a Nobel Peace Prize, and all along the way you don't know if he's the fireman or the pyromaniac. And you have to attend to both possibilities." He puts his hands one on top of the other, and then lays them both flat on the table.

"So yes, I felt the need strategically to create this moment of truth before the eruption, and before Clinton leaves."
Arafat's Children

Wearing a black dress and a fashionable white jacket, Arafat's dark-haired nine-year-old daughter, Zahwa, stood with her mother, Suha, and watched as her father's coffin was loaded on to a plane. "Don't cry, Zahwa," an Egyptian television announcer intoned as the scene was broadcast on the day of Yasir Arafat's funeral in Cairo. "Your father never cried. He was a man of patience and endurance." The press was naturally eager for a glimpse of the little girl who might inherit the Palestinian leader's fortune. Yet Zahwa was not Arafat's only child. Since the early 1970s Arafat had adopted a number of orphaned children, paying for their schooling and giving them away at their weddings. Of all Arafat's far-flung progeny the one to whom he was probably closest was Raeda Taha, who was adopted by Arafat when she was eight years old, after the death of her father, the PFLP and Black September terrorist Ali Taha.

A lively woman in her early forties with a low smoker's voice, Raeda has sharp features that could be pretty or ugly, a slightly receding chin, and large, beautiful eyes, which are set off to great advantage by her white fur coat and diamond earrings. In 2002, while living in Ramallah, during Operation Defensive Shield, she decided to write a book about her father, who hijacked Sabena Flight 517 from Brussels to Tel Aviv on May 8, 1972, with three accomplices, and was shot dead by a commando team led by Ehud Barak.

"I don't care if he died for Palestine or anything else," Raeda says, when I meet her at a restaurant on a rainy night in Ramallah. "He looked like a movie star," she remembers. "White, perfect teeth, and shining eyes. He was very young." As a child, Raeda knew that the men who came discreetly to her parents' apartment in West Beirut to sip tea were important guests who belonged to a secret world.

"I remember my mother would open the door and I will peek a little bit and I would look to see who they are," she says, naming several well-known international terrorists of the 1970s. "I remember Carlos," she says, of the terrorist who was known as "The Jackal," and who now resides in a French jail. "He would play with us a little bit. Wadi Hadad used to come a lot." Wadi Hadad was the inventor of airplane hijacking as a political weapon; his brother Isad was the owner of the exclusive girls' school that Raeda attended in Beirut.

The day Ali Taha left on his final trip, he hugged his daughters good-bye and promised his wife that this would be his last trip abroad. When her mother heard the news that a plane had been hijacked to Tel Aviv, she called her husband's controller in the PFLP and confessed her fears. "And he told her, 'Not in your wildest dreams. Just go back to sleep.'" The next morning Raeda saw her father's picture on the front page of the newspaper, and took it to the superintendent of her school.

"I knocked at the door and I went in and I put the newspaper behind my back and I told him, 'Mr. Hassan, good morning. I want to ask you a question. What's the meaning of shahid?' And he said, 'Why are you asking me?' I told him, 'Just tell me the meaning.' He said, 'The one who dies for his country.'" Raeda went home, where she found that her mother had been given tranquilizers. The apartment was filled with people, who told her that her father was a hero who had died for Palestine.

"I knew the story by heart," she says. "He did something very heroic that nobody could do. To take a plane from one place to another was a big thing to me." Raeda also remembered the man who had come to her house in disguise before her father left on his final journey.

"I asked my mother when I was probably ten, or nine. I told her, 'Mom, I know this man from his mouth. He had this big mouth, with his lips—you know. She said, 'You're right.'" On the third day after her father's death the mystery man showed up at her house again.

"He called my mother and he called all of us, and he said, 'Listen to me carefully what I'm going to tell you now. I am your father now, and I'll be taking care of you, and you needn't worry about anything,'" Raeda remembers, taking another cigarette from the pack on the table. "He said, 'These children are mine from now on, and their father is my brother, and whatever you dream during the night, I'm ready to make it come true.'"

Being close to the Old Man was pleasant for a child. He was small in size, and had small, soft hands. He liked to kiss Raeda and her three sisters, and play with their hair.

"Your father was a very brave man," the Old Man would say. "He did something very good for Palestine. Your mommy loves you very much, and I love you very much, and whenever you want to see me and whenever you need anything, you can come and tell me." He asked the girls what they wanted to be when they grew up.

"I told him, 'I want to become an astronaut,'" Raeda remembers. "He looked at me; he said, 'Yeah, maybe.' I told him, 'Like Valentina Tereshkova.' He said, 'Yeah. By the time we go back to Palestine, probably you will be the first Palestinian astronaut.'"

Every few months or so throughout their childhood, and on birthdays, Raeda and her sisters would accompany their mother to a dingy office where her new father sat behind his desk, surrounded by his bodyguards. When he saw the girls, he would stand up and gasp with excitement, and come out from behind his desk. He would grab the four girls, and sit next to them, and kiss them, and ask how they were doing in school. One year, on the birthday of one of Raeda's sisters, a piano arrived. When Raeda went off to college in the United States, Arafat paid her tuition. When she visited him in Tunis, he would feed her ice cream and boast about her grades.

After she graduated from college, she became his press secretary. They ate together often.

"He enjoyed a little gossip, just to let you know that he is normal like you. He would ask me from time to time, 'What about your love life? No love?' I tell him, 'No love.' 'Why? Life is not beautiful without love, my dear.' I told him, 'You should say that to yourself,'" Raeda says, laughing. She taps the ash from her cigarette. "He would notice if I am wearing something new. 'This is a new bag. This is a new dress—I haven't seen you wearing it before.' He likes to get involved in your details, to let you know that he is normal. And he likes to tell you things about himself. You know, 'When I was young, I never liked to eat roheyeh or okra. I never like these two dishes. My big sister, my oldest sister, used to make me roheyeh and okra all the time, and I became a freedom fighter just to run away from her.'" Raeda laughs.

She offers me a cigarette, which I accept in the hope that it might quiet my bronchitis.

"I'll tell you about the last moments I saw him," she says finally. "He was lying down like this, you know, and he had this big smile on him with his training suit, and when he saw me, he said, 'Ah.'" Raeda sighs. "He said, 'So you came. How are you, my love? I miss you.' His hand was white. I was caressing his hand, and then I kissed it, and then he grabbed my hand with his full strength and he brought it close to his mouth and he kissed it. He said, 'Don't worry. I'll be fine. Yesterday I wasn't feeling well at all, but today I am feeling much better.'"

I ask her how many people came to visit Arafat at the end of his life.

"Very few people coming and going," she remembers, of the day before Arafat left Ramallah. "I stayed there until twelve o'clock, and then I told him, 'I wish you a safe trip, and I'll be waiting for you.' He said, 'Wait for me. I will come back.' I said good-bye to him and I left, and he never came back."