



Gaza stripped

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Colaboraciones n° 1857

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“They stole almost everything,” complained Fatah spokesman Ahmed Abdel Rahman, “including Arafat’s Nobel Peace Prize medal.” There was something rather poignant about the looting of the late Chairman Arafat’s home in Gaza City by Hamas’ finest – and not just because, as the blogger Maynard pointed out on Tammy Bruce’s web site, if Hamas had only waited a year or two, the Nobel wallahs would have been happy to give the lads a Peace Prize of their own. Sadly, Israel’s latest designated “partner in peace” was in too much of a hurry for their piece.

It will be the first of many indignities heaped on the Chairman’s memory. In years to come, the world’s late 20th-century Arafatuation should make an interesting case study on the ease with which west-

ern illusions and Arab opportunism can combine in entirely disastrous ways. A good starting point would be the famous 1974 resolution by the Arab League declaring Arafat’s PLO to be the “sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people”. Scholars will marvel at the way the region’s kings and dictators not only ran this absurd banner up the flagpole but persuaded just about everybody on the planet to salute it: The United Nations began treating Arafat as the leader of a sovereign nation, giving him “official” status and inviting him to make speeches. He was a head of state lacking merely a state to head, and in overlooking that technicality the UN only underlined his inevitability.

To be the “sole legitimate representative” is an impressive claim for an organization barely a decade old.

But, that aside, how does any group get to be the “sole” representative of a people? In Afghanistan and Iraq, for example, we understood there were multiple representatives representing different slivers of their diverse peoples. But in “Palestine” it was a lot easier. The rap against most Middle Eastern nations is that they’re the artificial inventions of the French and British colonial administrators of 1922. There may be an Iraq drawn on a map by Winston Churchill after lunch but there’s no “Iraqis” – just Sunni, Shia, Kurds. But it’s the opposite scenario in “Palestine”. There has never been a Palestinian state yet there is apparently a Palestinian people, fully formed and of one mind and marching in lock-step behind their “sole legitimate representative”.

We now know this is not the case. Just to pluck more or less at random from the wires:

Jamal Abu Jadian, a top Fatah commander, fled his home in the northern Gaza Strip on Tuesday evening dressed as a woman... When he arrived at a hospital a few hundred meters away from his house, he was discovered by a group of Hamas gunmen, who took turns shooting him in the head with automatic rifles. ‘They literally blew his head off with more than 40 bullets,’ said a doctor.

Also:

Muhammad Swairki, 28, a cook for Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas’s presidential guard, was thrown to his death, with his hands and legs tied, from a

15-story apartment building in Gaza City on Sunday.

Muslims killing Muslims. Not a Jew for miles. So whose fault is it? Jeremy Bowen, the BBC’s Middle East Editor and one of those chaps who’s been authoritatively explaining the Palestinians and Israelis to British telly viewers for as long as I can remember, was in no doubt: The Palestinian Authority has “already taken a severe battering from Israel’s military actions over the last seven years and, more recently, by the punishing financial sanctions imposed by Israel and other countries after Hamas won a free election at the beginning of last year... The financial sanctions they imposed, which caused severe hardship and helped fuel the violence in Gaza by making people even more desperate...” Etc.

“Severe hardship.” “Desperation.” In fact, “aid” to the Palestinian territories has doubled since Hamas was elected. They apparently spend most of it on their militias – the crack chef-defenestrating unit and whatnot – plus miscellaneous “Islamist causes”. But again, as with that ancient Arab League resolution, what’s interesting are the assumptions behind Bowen’s analysis: No matter what depravity they commit it is always the fault of others. If I were one of the many charming Palestinians one meets in Paris and London and New York, I would regard this as not just condescending but racist.

But that’s the least of it. The fact is that, to Bowen and co, the “Palestinian people” were never more than

anonymous extras to fill out the backdrop for their “sole legitimate representative” Arafat. Lest you think I exaggerate the west’s Arafatuation, bear in mind that one of Bowen’s BBC colleagues broke down in tears reporting on the old monster’s passing. His actual subjects are drier-eyed, and even less sentimental about the kleptocrat’s bespoke sidekicks, the secular socialists such as Saeb Erekat and Hanan Ashrawi promoted on CNN as the “representatives” of the Palestinian people. They don’t represent anybody. But it was foolish to assume that in the vacuum of their ersatz Arafatist identity something genuine would not one day take root: Hamas is it, the umpteenth branch office of Iranian-promoted pan-Islamism. Not a pretty sight but, unlike the pseudo-nationalist

struggle promoted by Arafat, it’s for real.

Still, if it’s any consolation to the late Chairman, the killing of his supporters is part of a grand tradition. Arafat’s uncle, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and the first “Arab nationalist” colossus of the modern era, launched his revolt against the British in 1936. By the time the dust settled, there were hundreds of dead British, hundreds of dead Jews, and thousands of dead Muslims, the vast majority of that last group murdered by the Mufti’s men as part of intra-Muslim score-settling. “Kill the Jews wherever you find them,” the Mufti liked to say, but, for all the stirring rhetoric, he found it a lot easier to kill his fellow Muslims. Even in Palestine, some things never change.