

Yasser Arafat: Modern era's Saladin

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



BRIG GEN SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN NDC, PSC (RETD)

THE west saw him as a terrorist; to the rest of the world he was an intrepid warrior trying relentlessly to right the wrong his nation was done in 1948. He was fighting to regain for his nation a country which was cynically snatched away from the Palestinians through a mix of British treachery and western hypocrisy. To his people, he was an icon of the struggle for freedom. Unfortunately, he did not live to see the full fruition of his dreams, a Palestinian state.

Sixteen years ago on this day Yasser Arafat, who had assumed the *nom de guerre* Abu Ammar, passed away under questionable circumstances that have not quiet been answered satisfactorily. But this is not the occasion to dwell on the circumstances of his death; suffice it to say that doubts remain regarding the cause of it even today. Instead, let us look at the man who dominated global news and influenced world and in particular Middle Eastern politics, for a good part of four decades, with a dispassionate eye.

Yasser Arafat and Palestine are linked umbilically, and one day his name may become a symbol for the state of Palestine. He was one person with three personae—leader of a freedom movement that was being participated in by more than one group fighting for the liberation of Palestine, each with their individual ideological leanings, an acclaimed leader of a stateless nation whose homeland had been usurped, and an administrator of a nebulous state entity that went by the name of Palestinian Authority—a leader with people but no well-defined state.

According to Adam Shatz, the well-known literary editor at the London Review of Books, "In the Arab imagination, Palestine is not simply a plot of land, any more than Israel is a plot of land in the Jewish imagination. As the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish has observed, Palestine is also a metaphor—

for the loss of Eden, for the sorrows of dispossession and exile, for the declining power of the Arab world in its dealings with the West." And it was to right the wrong, to retrieve the loss and revive the Arabs that Arafat dedicated his life. Those who belittle Arafat as being merely a symbol rather than a leader, caring more about the state than his legacy, often forget that a person cannot be one without being the other, but that first and foremost he has to be a leader before he can assume the status of an icon. Near the end of his life Arafat had subsumed himself within the people saying, "Each Palestinian

existence, while Palestinian nationalists believed the battle was for the West Bank and Gaza", reconciliation and bringing the various groups together was a tall order. That led to a deficit of trust between the stakeholders. In return for Israeli recognition of PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinians, PLO accepted Israel's right to exist, thereby, risking Arafat's own future. He is criticised for acceding to the Accord since he could not achieve a Palestinian state during his lifetime. But the critics do not realise that the Accord was not an end in itself since it was meant to be a prelude to future

blamed for not clamping down on violence, Israel can be blamed, according to a Hamas leader, for "misusing such negotiations to win time with a view to imposing more realities on the ground." Violence was as a reaction to Israeli actions. There were 100,000 settlers before the agreement and now the number hit 750,000 settlers living illegally in the occupied West Bank. Currently, Israel has annexed 30 percent of the occupied territory under Trump's so-called "Deal of the Century" announced on January 28 this year. It refers to Jerusalem as "Israel's undivided capital" and recognises Israeli sovereignty

is convenient to overlook history selectively. At least the leaders of Israel, a country that was born out of a violent terrorist movement, have no moral right to label any other group or nation fighting for their independence as terrorists. Recall the name Irgun, the Jewish right-wing underground movement in Palestine, founded in 1931, an extremist nationalist group which called for the use of force to establish a Jewish state on both sides of the Jordan River. It has many terror acts to its credit, including the bombing of the King David Hotel in 1946. Interestingly, this very terrorist group was subsumed in the Israeli defence forces after Palestine was given away to the Jews, in 1948. Perhaps the names Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir would jog our memory too. Apart from the fact that they were the sixth and seventh prime ministers of Israel, they were also leaders of this terrorist organisation. Several Israeli politicians and prime ministers are offsprings of Irgun members. And for the US to apply the terrorist label to others is like the pot calling the kettle black. It was fined by the ICJ in 1986 for its support for, and acts of, terror in Nicaragua. Even Nelson Mandela's name remained on the US terrorism watch list till 2008. His ANC was dubbed a terrorist organisation during the period of the Cold War.

Sixteen years after Yasser Arafat's death, people are still dissecting his legacy. His name has become synonymous with Palestine and its aspirations. He can be credited with reviving the Palestinian cause after the serious reverses of the 1967 Arab Israeli War along with his generation of Palestinian leadership by bringing the disparate groups under one umbrella and giving it an identity and a revolutionary character. He wanted to give peace a chance, but Israel had other plans. Even after more than 70 years, Israel continues to be motivated by Golda Meir's view that: "There is no such thing as a Palestinian people... It is not as if we came and threw them out and took their country. They didn't exist."

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Palestinian university art students work on a mural depicting late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in the West Bank city of Nablus.

PHOTO: ABED OMAR QUSINI/REUTERS

is Yasser Arafat, who is part and parcel of the Palestinian people, the great people, who will stand fast until doomsday."

He is often vilified for his failure to transform the Oslo Accord into a permanent peace, unfairly, overlooking Israel's contribution to the failure of the 1993 Accord. Given the disparate and divergent views within the Arabs and within the Palestinians, since, by the concept of the Palestinian struggle, "Islamists and others hoped the struggle was to end Israel's

negotiations. Yasser Arafat may not have lived to see success but that the Palestine issue remains at the top of the global agenda is because of him.

The Oslo Accord was bound to fail, being flawed *ab initio*. What else could be the fate of a treaty that did not address the fundamental abrasive issue for the Palestinians—illegal settlements? Giving in to the pressure of the rejectionists, Rabin refused to include the settlement freeze clause. This saw settlement double between 1993 and 2000. If Arafat is

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over large parts of the West Bank. Trump's acknowledgement of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and the latest Middle East peace plan has pushed back any immediate resolution of the problems, including the implementation of Oslo Accord.

The US and the west are known for their hypocrisy as far as terrorism is concerned. But their greatest hypocrisy is labelling Yasser Arafat as a terrorist. Not surprisingly, these critics do not see their own faces in the mirror, particularly the Israelis; for them it

America returns to the Paris Agreement on climate change

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



SALEEMUL HUQ

It is indeed a great relief that Biden has already declared that he will immediately re-enter the Paris Agreement from which Trump had withdrawn the US two years ago. However, simply re-joining the Paris Agreement will not be enough

THE election of Joe Biden as the next president of the United States of America has brought a great sigh of relief to everyone around the world who wants to see global action to tackle the threat of climate change. It is undoubtedly true that another term for Trump would have caused almost irretrievable harm to the ability of the rest of the world to tackle the climate change problem while the US was actively opposing collective global actions.

It is indeed a great relief that Biden has already declared that he will immediately re-enter the Paris Agreement from which Trump had withdrawn the US two years ago. However, simply re-joining the Paris Agreement will not be enough as the US has lost significant time and in many ways moved backwards under Trump. Hence the US has a lot of catching up to do and will have to move very quickly to do so.

There are undoubtedly a number of positive developments which can be built upon. The first is the improvement of solar and wind energy technology in efficiency and costs such that they have already become cheaper than coal and will very soon become cheaper than even petroleum and then natural gas. Therefore, despite Trump's efforts to support coal, he has been largely unsuccessful for simple economic reasons and even Republican governors of states like Texas and Montana have embraced renewable

energy since it is cheaper, cleaner and generates new well-paying green jobs. In fact one of the most effective election arguments that Biden made was to say "jobs" when asked about climate change where Trump said "hoax"!

The second important positive development has been the technology for electric cars, trucks and buses that not just companies like Tesla who pioneered the sales of electric vehicles are benefiting from their sales but even the major manufacturers of combustion engine based vehicles are changing to electric vehicles much quicker than anyone had anticipated. Hence the economic forces of the market are driving a positive change in the vehicle market of the US as well as the rest of the world.

The third and perhaps most powerful positive change in the US is the attitude of young people, who overwhelmingly want much stronger actions to tackle climate change and it is quite likely that it is their votes that have propelled Biden over the finish line against Trump. It is also quite evident that Biden himself was not initially a great believer in the need to make tackling climate change a major plank of his agenda, but was persuaded by the more progressive parts of the Democratic Party to do so and it is now a major part of his agenda.

The good news is that Biden is a pragmatic rather than ideological politician and hence he will accept the reality of success in the transition from fossil fuel energy to renewable energy which is the key factor that needs to be addressed.

In terms of addressing the Paris Agreement, which in fact was agreed under President Obama and Vice

President Biden in 2015, all countries are supposed to submit their revised plans for enhancing their reduction in emissions of greenhouse gases by December 31, 2020. Because Biden won't be sworn in as president until January 20, 2021, we can allow him an extension of a few weeks to submit the US Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) where they have to say by when they will be able to reach net zero emissions of greenhouse gases. The good news is that already



ILLUSTRATION: SARAH GRILLO/AXIOS

major emitters such as China have agreed to do so by 2060, Europe by 2050 and even California has said it will do so by 2045. Hence the US needs to at least do so by 2050 if not sooner.

The second major promise that the developed countries made—including the US—in the Paris Agreement was to provide the developing countries with up to USD 100 billion a year by 2020 to tackle climate change. The US share of that would have been at least USD 3 billion in 2016.

One of the last things that President Obama did before he handed power over to Trump was to provide USD 500 million to the Green Climate Fund (GCF) as he knew that the first thing Trump would do was stop the US contribution, which is what he indeed did.

Thus the US now has to fulfil its own share of the USD 100 billion from 2020 onwards.

From the perspective of the most vulnerable developing countries, the

final element that the US will need to address is somewhat more politically sensitive. It is the issue of addressing loss and damage from climate change. The US Secretary of State John Kerry, on behalf of President Obama, made the developing countries accept that they could not raise the issue of liability and compensation under Article 8 on loss and damage of the Paris Agreement. The reality of human induced climate change impacts during 2020, including the super wildfires in California and Oregon and the successive hurricanes hitting the Gulf Coast of the US, is showing that loss and damage from climate change is now a reality for all countries whether rich or poor and hence the issue cannot be postponed any longer.

Hence the most sensitive test for the incoming Biden presidency on climate change will be its willingness (or not) to genuinely address the issue of funding loss and damage from climate change for the most vulnerable developing countries who will be demanding this at COP26 to be held in November 2021 in Scotland.

Hence it is up to Prime Minister Boris Johnson of the UK and Biden to make sure that this issue is dealt with in a spirit of solidarity with the vulnerable developing countries at COP26. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh can play a significant role on behalf of the CVF countries if invited to do so.

Thus the test of how seriously and quickly Biden will act to tackle the different aspects of climate change will be revealed at COP26 next year.

Dr Saleemul Huq is director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development at the Independent University, Bangladesh.

QUOTABLE Quote

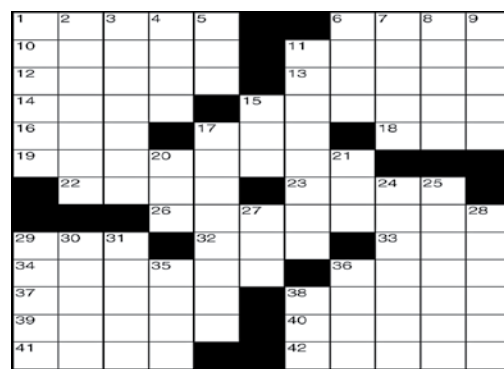


NORMAN MAILER (1923-2007) American novelist and journalist.

Harsh words live in the dungeon of the heart.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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|-------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| ACROSS | 34 Opinion opener | 9 Traded |
| 1 Lily variety | 36 Gambling city | 11 Wise saying |
| 6 Herring's kin | 37 Hag | 15 Shelley work |
| 10 Steer clear of | 38 Car part | 17 Bar member |
| 11 Make amends | 39 Twisted | 20 Brief time |
| 12 Orange coats | 40 Writer Walker | 21 Plopped down |
| 13 Lively dance | 41 Hangs low | 24 Kind of map or code |
| 14 Quiche start | 42 River to the Rio Grande | 25 Venezuelan river |
| 15 "That's life" | | 27 Diving bird |
| 16 Finish | DOWN | 28 Future ferns |
| 17 Commotion | 1 Line of work | 29 Chooses |
| 18 So far | 2 City on the Rhone | 30 Parts of hearts |
| 19 Coffee workers | 3 Stressful period | 31 Skimpy swimwear |
| 22 Russian denial | 4 Toppers | 35 Print supplies |
| 23 "Othello" villain | 5 TV spots | 36 Part |
| 26 Amusement park attractions | 6 Hide away | 38 Atlas page |
| 29 Touch lightly | 7 Like colanders | |
| 32 Toddy base | 8 Sock site | |
| 33 Quick taste | | |



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



BEETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES

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