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Subject: The Wrong Question: WWho Killed Arafat

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Who Killed Arafat Is The Wrong Question.

By Edward Jay Epstein

Yasser Arafat, the President of the Palestinian National Authority, died at the age of 75 on November 11, 2004 at the Percy Military Hospital in Clamart, France. He had been in a coma for more than a week, attended by teams of doctors from Egypt, Tunisia, and France, and died, according to his doctors, from a massive haemorrhagic cerebrovascular failure. There was no autopsy because his own family prohibited it possibly out of concern that revelation from it about his consumption of alcohol or other drug use would undermine his public image in the Moslem world. His 558 pages of medical records were sealed, and then turned over to Palestinian authorities. Even so, a leak from hospital officials to the French newspaper Canard Enchaîné cited lesions of the liver indicating cirrhosis (which could suggest alcohol abuse.)

Arafat had been a man of intrigue, deeply involved in conspiratorial operations and covert financing in the Middle East. A year or so before his death, forensic accountants retained by the Palestinian finance ministry, traced nearly \$1 billion in public funds to secret accounts, including one in the Cayman Islands, controlled by Arafat and his associates. Presumably they were used to fund the PLO's secret operations. So it is not surprising that the mysteries surrounding his life extended to his death. Up until this summer, there was no shortage of conspiracy theories even though there was no evidence of foul play. In July 2012, however, after a 9 month investigation commissioned by the Palestinian National Authority, the Institute of Radiation Physics in Lausanne, Switzerland announced that it had found minute traces of polonium 210 on Arafat's keffiyeh, or head scarf and other personal belongs. Polonium 210 an extremely rare- and expensive- radioactive isotope rarely found in any substantial quantities outside of tightly-controlled government labs. It is also highly unstable with a half-life of only about 138 days. The discovery in 2012 of any Polonium 210 after it disintegrated over twenty half-lives since Arafat's death in 2004 suggests that Arafat's personal effects, had been exposed to a fairly substantial quantity. Polonium 210, like any radioactive isotope, if ingested into the body, can result in lethal radiation poisoning. But if that occurs, the radiation will also produce noticeable symptoms, such as hair loss, easily detected by doctors. In Arafat's case, however, none of the symptoms were detected by any of the doctors who spent more than a week trying to discover the cause of his illness prior to his death. Nor did the scientists at the Institute of Radiation Physics, who had all his medical records. Instead, they categorically concluded that the "symptoms described in Arafat's medical reports were not consistent with polonium-210." If so, Arafat, though he (or his effects) were exposed to Polonium 210, did not die from it. In other words, the Polonium 210 signature on his personal effects did not necessarily result from a murder plot. It is not uncommon for Polonium 210 to out of its container in a gaseous form and, attaching itself to specks of dust, to contaminate an environment without fatally poisoning anyone. But, if this was an accidental contamination, it raises an even spookier mystery: what activity brought Arafat in close contact with a container of Polonium 210?

There are two uses of Polonium 210 which could account for that level of accidental contamination. First, Polonium 210 can be used to help trigger the detonation of an early stage nuclear weapon. It was used by America and Russia use it as part of the trigger in their early bombs, and most, if not all, countries that had clandestine nuclear programs, including Israel, India, Iraq, Pakistan, South Africa, and North Korea (in 2006) employed it for that purpose. To obtain it often involves smuggling it across borders and its detection is no minor matter. As a declassified Los Alamos document in the 1990s noted., the detection of Polonium-210 remains "a key indication of a nuclear weapons program in its early stages. Even though Arafat had no known connection to any nuclear weapons program, possibly some of his associates possibly did.

\ The other nefarious use for Polonium-210 is to power miniaturized batteries for space probes and other government espionage operations. Because of the constant flow of alpha particles it emits as it decays, it can power a hidden transmitter has over long periods of time. It can be used, for example, to power a tiny transmitter in an embassy wall for many years. When Polonium 210 was detected on equipment in Iran in 2004, Iran

claimed to the International Atomic Energy Agency, the UN's nuclear proliferation watchdog, that it had been experimenting with it to use on batteries for a space probe. Though Iran has no known space program in 2004, it had espionage operations which could benefit from such a battery, and Iran, a supporter of Hamas, had an interest in the electronic surveillance of Arafat, who headed its arch rival Hamas. So did Israel and a half-dozen other intelligence services,

It is conceivable therefore that one or more intelligence services might have used such a device to intercept the conversations of Arafat and his associates, If so, the device could have leaked Polonium 210 either before or after Arafat' s death.

In any case, Arafat' s body was exhumed in November 2012, and samples of his bones sent to labs in Russia, France, and Switzerland. The results may clarify whether Arafat actually ingested any of the Polonium 210. But lacking these results, lets not jump to any conclusions as the role, if any, it played in his death.

As ever,
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