

## FOR YASSER ARAFAT, CRIME CERTAINLY PAID

By Amir Oren Haaretz 26 08 2011

An official U.S. State Department document acknowledges that America knew Yasser Arafat was personally behind the 1973 murder of its Khartoum ambassador; the upcoming Palestinian statehood bid has much to thank the perpetrators for.

"Crime doesn't pay" is a nice saying. When it comes to diplomacy, however, it nearly always does pay. Without murderous terrorism, Yasser Arafat would not have led the Palestinian national movement to many of its achievements, including his successor Mahmoud Abbas' plan to ask the United Nations General Assembly to recognize Palestine as an independent state next month. Abbas has secured a majority in support of this, although not for UN membership, which must be authorized by the UN Security Council.

Since Arafat first appeared on that platform, in 1974, his gun holster hanging from his belt, the Palestinians have advanced from being an organization (the Palestine Liberation Organization ) to an "authority" created by the Oslo Accords, and from there to being an embryonic state. Arafat leveraged Palestinian terror crudely - and directly. The terror attacks he masterminded eventually drove the Americans to offer him diplomatic recognition at the expense of its two veteran partners, Israel and Jordan.

On the eve of UN recognition of Palestine, 18 years after the Oslo Accords carried Arafat to the White House and from there to the Nobel Peace Prize, and seven years after his death, the U.S. government now confirms that Arafat was responsible for the 1973 murder of its ambassador and his deputy in Khartoum, Sudan. The two were taken hostage and killed "with the full knowledge and by the personal authorization" of Arafat, according to a study released last month by the U.S. State Department's Office of the Historian, entitled "Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XXV, Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1973." The incident began on March 1, 1973, when eight members of Black September stormed the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Khartoum during a reception, and captured the Saudi ambassador and four of his guests: American ambassador Cleo Noel, U.S. deputy chief of mission George Curtis Moore, and the Belgian and Jordanian charge d'affaires in Sudan. Black September was a transparent front for Fatah, and Arafat was the commander of both, as well as head of the PLO. When the kidnapers understood that Jordan, Israel and the United States would not be releasing prisoners in exchange for the captives, Fatah headquarters in Beirut ordered them to shoot the two Americans and the Belgian, Guy Eid.

Intelligence cover-up

Two months later - and one month after the so-called Spring of Youth raid on Beirut by an elite Israel Defense Forces unit, paratroopers and the Mossad, which killed three senior Palestinian leaders - Foreign Minister Abba Eban visited U.S. President Richard Nixon's National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger.

"During the Khartoum incident, someone suggested we ask you for help," Kissinger said, according to the newly released report. "You would have blown up Beirut."

Eban replied: "You know that it was from Beirut that the phone call went to finish them off."

Kissinger concurred: "We know that."

The official State Department archives do not contain information about intercepted communications between the Sudan terrorists and their handlers in Lebanon. For its part, the National Security Agency published its own documentation in the 1970s without any information concerning the Khartoum incident, which had been censored.

At the end of the 1990s, a former navy officer named James Welsh launched a campaign to denounce the intelligence, security and diplomacy establishments' failure to warn about the Khartoum attack. In letters to Congress and interviews with the media, Welsh said that between 1970 and 1974, he had worked in the NSA and secretly monitored the Palestinians' actions.

A day or two before the attack, the NSA recorded conversations about the terror plans, Welsh said, adding that he recognized the voice of Arafat telling his aides, Abu Jihad and Abu Iyad, to carry out the attack. The U.S. State Department was warned immediately, so it could pass on the message to the diplomats in Khartoum.

When he heard about the attack in the media, Welsh was astounded to discover that the person on duty had decided on her own that the warning was not urgent, and thus had delayed disseminating it. It arrived in Khartoum after the murders.

Welsh claimed that when he demanded that the State Department's failure be investigated, his superiors at the NSA told him such a campaign would cost him his security clearance and result in his transfer from Washington's quiet corridors to the rigors of a navy fueling ship. Welsh backed down.

While there had been no official response to Welsh's claims about the negligence that led to the disaster (which resembled the communication glitches that led to the positioning of the U.S. Navy ship Liberty off the Israeli coast in 1967 ), in 2006 the State Department half-heartedly recognized the part involving Arafat. The NSA's top-secret report on the Khartoum attack was reclassified, although it was released without its original publication date, signature or the list of recipients.

"The Khartoum operation was planned and carried out with the full knowledge and personal approval of Yasser Arafat," aided by representatives of Fatah in Khartoum, who transported the terrorists in their car, which enjoyed diplomatic immunity, the NSA report states. It makes no mention of U.S. governmental bodies, and it was included in a digitized collection of documents about Africa, published by the State Department's Office of the Historian, without an opinion as to its reliability.

Meanwhile, last month, the U.S. State Department published the above-mentioned study of Israeli-Arab relations. It contains that quote blaming Arafat. Now that the information has been declassified, this means the U.S. government's official position is that the attack was planned and carried out with Arafat's full knowledge and personal approval.

The Clinton and the first Bush administrations considered Arafat a partner for diplomatic dialogue and he was a high-ranking guest at the White House. From now on it will be hard for official American visitors to the future Palestinian state to lay a wreath on the grave of the person who orchestrated the Khartoum murders, according to the usual protocol.

#### Intoxicating success

The Khartoum operation was an intoxicating success for Arafat. It drew the Nixon administration to launch secret negotiations with him, through an intermediary, Richard Helms, ambassador to Iran and CIA head through 1973. The contacts were conducted with Ali Hassan Salameh, "Arafat's right-hand man," as Helms put it, and Black September's operations officer.

Nixon and Kissinger wanted to moderate Arafat's policies and prevent further terror attacks (against Americans; the others didn't count). For his part, the Palestinian leader leveraged the attacks to conduct diplomatic negotiations, unbeknownst to Israel and Jordan.

In a meeting at the White House with Noel and Moore's widows on May 17, 1973, Nixon said he envied the "ruthlessness" of the Soviet and Israeli responses to terror, adding that "damned terrorism" was tearing other countries, like Lebanon, apart.

"It's poisoning the whole Middle East," Nixon said. "It gets down to the Arab-Israeli problem. Until that is solved, it will go on. I have talked to Mrs. [Golda] Meir as strongly as possible. Egypt is tough; Jordan is reasonable. The best way to get at terrorism is to get at the Arab-Israeli dispute. We are talking to the Russians. Dr. Kissinger is talking to the Israelis (off the record but they leak)."

Kissinger and Arafat maintained contact even at the height of the Yom Kippur War, and this process culminated with a meeting between deputy CIA director Gen. Vernon Walters and Arafat's second in command, Khalid al-Hassan, a week after the war ended, on November 3. The encounter took place in Rabat, Morocco. King Hassan was the intermediary, and the discussions mainly addressed the PLO's demands.

Khalid asked, "with visible embarrassment, whether the U.S. had anything to do with the murder of their leaders in Beirut," a question that had bothered him since the Spring of Youth campaign, the State Department study states.

Kissinger reported that Walters said, "I replied quite firmly that we had nothing to do with these murders. I gave him my word of honor as a soldier. I replied that we did not resort to murder because it was morally wrong, dishonorable and did not produce results. Bullets killed only men, not ideas."

Walters was dissembling: The assassinations and targeted killings carried out by the CIA, U.S. special forces or emissaries did not begin with Osama bin Laden or even with the attempts to kill Fidel Castro 50 years earlier.

"I said I would ask him no questions about Khartoum," Walters reportedly continued, "but we did not resort to murder. He [al-Hassan] replied with some embarrassment that in all large groups where there has been much suffering, there are some who undertake violence on their own. I understood him to be telling me that the Khartoum murders were not sanctioned by the Fatah leadership."

#### Seeds of South Sudan

The Palestinian state-building began "on the backs" of the Khartoum attack's victims, Noel and Moore. At the same time, while the government in Khartoum exhibited admiration for the PLO and quickly freed the murderers, Israel strengthened its ties with Sudanese rebels.

This July 17, South Sudan declared independence and was accepted as a member of the United Nations. Around that time, at an evening in memory of Brig. Gen. Meir Amit, Ephraim Halevy, a former Mossad head, said: "Citizens of the new country owe their independence to seeds sown 40 years ago by two heads of the Mossad: Amit, who started giving them Israeli aid, and Zvika Zamir, who increased it." Halevy promised to say more at the memorial ceremony for Amit next year.