

ISRAEL NEWS FROM DAVID

DOLAN

THE DEATH OF ARAFAT

JERUSALEM, 12:00 NOON, THURSDAY NOVEMBER 11

The sound of mournful chanting from the Al Aksa mosque minaret on the nearby Temple Mount has filled the air of central Jerusalem all morning, along with the distant roar of Israeli warplanes streaking over the clouds far above the holy city. Dark smoke is rising into the air from most Arab neighborhoods as young Palestinians set rubber tires on fire in order to turn the sky black.

Both Palestinians and Israelis woke up today to the news that Yasser Arafat had finally died overnight in a hospital near Paris. Following the long anticipated announcement, Israeli and Palestinian preparations have swung into high gear for his final burial near Jerusalem, expected either on Friday afternoon or Saturday morning, which will follow a “state funeral” in Cairo tomorrow.

Soon after Arafat’s death was confirmed, the Israeli government imposed a total closure on all Palestinian cities and towns. Analysts say this is mainly designed to prevent a massive turnout for the burial in Ramallah this weekend—which happens to be the climax of the Islamic fasting month of Ramadan. Severe restrictions will be placed on Muslims wishing to gather for Friday prayers on the Temple Mount. Palestinian officials, who have declared a forty day period of mourning, are already bitterly complaining about the closure. Their main gripe is that it will prevent hundreds of thousands of mourners from the towns of Nablus, Jenin and Bethlehem, and villages around them, from attending the funeral.

In fact, Israeli officials have long planned to tighten the cordon around Palestinian population centers when Arafat died to prevent a huge turnout for his interment, especially if the funeral was held anywhere near the contested capital city. The assessment was that a massive crowd was more likely to turn violent, and encourage attempts by Arafat’s more radical supporters to forcibly carry his corpse through Israeli security checkpoints toward the Old City’s Temple Mount, where he wished to be buried in the Hussein family mausoleum (Arafat was part of that Arab clan, which included the Hitler-aligned Grand

Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin Hussein).

Israeli leaders are especially concerned over continuing claims that they somehow managed to poison the Palestinian leader. Hamas leader Khaled Mashal—who was himself the subject of a failed Mossad poison attempt in 1997—repeated the incendiary claim this morning on the Arab Al Jazeera satellite television network. This is seen by security officials as a signal for militant Hamas followers to attack Israeli targets during the protracted mourning period.

SORROW AND JOY

While most Palestinians mourn the passing of their longtime leader, I have been receiving some e mail messages of delight today from Orthodox Jewish groups and individuals. One quotes Psalm 15:6: “Let everything which has breath praise the Lord! Hallelujah!” Some have been passing along a joke that appeared in the New York Post newspaper earlier this week, which I believe accurately reflects the private, if publicly-politically-incorrect, feelings of most Israelis: “Arafat goes to a fortune teller and asks: ‘On what day will I die?’ The fortune teller says: ‘It will be on a Jewish Holiday.’ Arafat asks: ‘Which one? Rosh Ha Shana? Yom Kippur?’ The fortune teller replies: ‘I do not know, but whatever day you die, it will be a Jewish Holiday.’”

Although such sentiments may sound crude to most international observers, it must be recalled that Arafat was directly responsible for a long line of terror attacks that left scores of Israeli Jews and others dead during the tumultuous decades that he ruled the PLO. Indeed, the notorious Palestinian leader was widely seen as a virtual reincarnation of the biblical Haman, who attempted to wipe out the entire Jewish race. Despite this, he was reluctantly accepted by a majority of Israelis as a legitimate peace partner after shaking hands with the late Yitzhak Rabin on the White house lawn in 1993. However, his subsequent inability—many say refusal—to keep his written Oslo pledge to halt all violence against Israelis placed him squarely back in the onus box.

Arafat’s repeated threats in recent years to force all Israelis to “drink the waters of the Dead Sea” if they did not hand him control over Jerusalem (in other words to kill them, since drinking the Dead Sea’s heavy mineral water induces death) did not exactly endear him to them. Nor did his many calls for the “liberation” of the holy city by “a million shahid martyrs”—thought by many analysts to be a thinly veiled call for nearby Muslim nations to use non-conventional weapons to annihilate Israel, even if it meant most local Palestinian would die as well.

Exactly ten years after he received the Nobel Peace Prize, Arafat has

finally exited the Mideast and world stage—without bringing lasting peace to his destitute people. I will discuss his controversial life and legacy with several others during a special Moody Broadcasting Network presentation later today. The program begins at 22:00 GMT, or 2:00 PM PST, 5:00 PM EST in North America. To listen online, go to www.mbn.org. I will also be sending you my personal reflections about the late Yasser Arafat—who indirectly nearly killed me several times—in a World Net Daily commentary.

On last note: Several planning to travel to Israel soon on tour have written to ask me if it is safe to come at this time. In fact, Jerusalem is filled with overseas tourists, more than I have seen in over four years. I am meeting with some of these groups during the next few weeks. Several “mega-tours” are also in town, including hundreds of people who came with Benny Hinn and others with Zola Levitt (who plans to interview me tomorrow). Despite the heightened state of alert, I believe that it is safe to travel here at present, although groups may find some places off limits (like the Temple Mount, closed to tourists on Wednesday) due to the situation. As usual, Jewish and Arab guides will be closely monitoring the news, and will certainly not place any of their people in harm's way.