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PLO LEADER'S CONFIDENCE TRICK

YASSER Arafat went into a frenzy of activity when he discovered that he would be unable to honor the solemn undertaking he had given as part of his agreement with Israeli leaders to cancel the "offensive" clauses in the Palestinian Covenant. These clauses promise to put an end to the Jewish state and dispose of most of its Jewish residents (by forced exile or otherwise). His inquiries within the PLO had revealed to him that he would be unable to command the majority in the Palestinian National Council which was essential for such a drastic change of policy.

He immediately set in train a variety of pressures - letters to every member of the PNC, inspired articles in the Arabic press throughout the world, appeals for intervention by the leaders of the Arab states, speeches in mosques - all with the end of getting the recalcitrant members of the council to change their minds. "How," he cried, in one of his speeches in a mosque, "how can we expect the Israelis to make peace with us, and trust us to keep our word when we, the body recognized by the Arab nation as the 'sole representative of the Palestinian people,' continue to adhere to our plan for destroying Israel 'phase by phase' and erasing from history the whole concept of Israel as a State and the Jews as a nation?" Anyone who has lived through the 450-odd days since the historic handshake and the signing of the agreement between Arafat and Rabin will recognize at once that what I have written here is a figment of my imagination. It is what should have happened, had there been the smallest grain of truth in the belief, promoted throughout the world by Rabin, Peres and company, that the Arabs (Palestinians and others who subscribed at the Rabat Conference in 1974 to the recognition of the PLO) are seeking to make an honorable peace with Israel.

Arafat never "discovered" that he could not carry out his undertaking. He knew it long before he entered into negotiations with the Rabin-Aloni government. He knew it because he himself had not the slightest intention of trying to have the covenant, or any part of it, altered or abrogated.

Nobody more than Arafat hopes to consummate in his lifetime the covenant's stated purpose. As a good political strategist and naturally well-versed in the tenets of Islam, Arafat knows that even if the whole covenant were officially abolished, its purpose could, and would, still be pursued. Nobody has expunged from Islamic doctrine the principle - as stated by the great 11th-century Moslem theologian Al Ghazzali - that "a lie is permissible if it is the only way of obtaining a good result," or the principle of making promises you do not mean to keep.

There were, however, good grounds for Arafat to believe that he would not need the absolution granted by Islamic doctrine. He had good reason to believe the Israelis wouldn't break off negotiations even if the covenant remained in full force. He knew that, months before the agreement, the Israeli Foreign Office instructed diplomatic and consular representatives to cease spreading the text of the Palestinian Covenant, that is, to suppress the evidence of the enemy's intentions.

When the time came, Arafat's policy was vindicated. When he announced that he could not get the PNC (the PLO "parliament") to amend the covenant, the Israeli

government, with the collaboration of the Hebrew press, accepted this as an adequate response to its demands. THUS AS Rabin and his colleagues march forward, arm-in-arm with Arafat, Israel will reach the point - unless the process is stopped - where a Palestinian State is established.

In his opening statement as president, Arafat will be able to announce that the first clause in his state's constitution, kept intact with Israel's acquiescence, lays down the imperative: to wipe Israel off the face of the earth. A majority of citizens and numerous friends of the Jewish people abroad are nervously asking: "Has this government gone crazy?" The answer is: "No, it hasn't gone crazy." The policy of the Rabin-Aloni government stems from the years-long intoxication of its members with the desire to surrender Judea, Samaria and Gaza to the Arabs; and a readiness, if pressed, to give up the eastern part of Jerusalem as well - whatever the cost. The cost, as it turned out, includes Israeli lives.

Just a few years ago, the people of Israel were told that the intifada could not be stopped by military means. Only political means could achieve it. That signified negotiations and, of course, Israeli concessions - the formula for a defeated people.

We have had negotiations - called the peace process - and an agreement involving far-reaching concessions. But the terror has not been stopped. It goes on, more fiercely than ever.

When negotiations with Arafat opened, it was understood naturally that Israel was dealing with the "leader of the Palestinian people." "No," said Arafat, "the agreement will be with the PLO." By simple sleight of hand, the torch of terror was passed on by Arafat to a segment of the "Palestinian people" (Hamas) whom, suddenly, he does not represent, for whose actions he denies responsibility, and whose murders (far more numerous than in the old intifada days) he sometimes does, and sometimes does not, deign to denounce.

With a submissive media backing him, nobody points out to Rabin the enormity of the hideous confidence trick played by Arafat, with the help of the Israeli government, on the sorely-tried Israeli people. The government and its apologists now pretend that the continuation of terror is the most natural concomitant of a "peace process." To add insult to injury, Rabin offers the Israeli people the inane and callous formula: "We shall proceed with the peace process as if there were no terror, and fight terror as if there were no peace process." It may be assumed without reservation that Arafat finds this formula most acceptable.