

Arafat's Death Still a Mystery

Interview with Yasser Arafat's primary physician

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Interview: Yasser Arafat's primary physician

Dr. Ashraf Al Kurdi

Amman, Jordan

January 18, 2005

Q: The US press has insinuated that Yasser Arafat died of AIDS. Are you aware of this?

A: I heard rumors he died of AIDS. I have done the HIV tests many times before on Arafat as a routine test. It was never positive.

Q: When was the last time you did a test?

A: About six months before he died. The Tunisian doctors told me they did this test in Ramallah and it was normal.

Q: Did Arafat have any longstanding health problems?

A: No, apart from the benign, nonessential tremor which manifests as a tremor in the lips and hands. He never had anything else.

Q: Did he have Parkinson's Disease?

A: Actually, this was investigated many times. No. It was the tremor only. He was tested many times for Parkinsons.

Q: How long have you been Arafat's primary physician?

A: More than 25 years.

Q: You treated him after the plane crash in Libya?

A: Yes. We saved his life from bilateral subdural hematoma. This produced changes in his mental state and his physical appearance. He developed hemoplegia and when we caught it he was operated on in Amman.

Q: Could this cause any later medical condition?

A: No complications whatsoever. The operation went very smooth and was done by an ordinary neurosurgeon.

Q: Before you saw him the last time, had he had regular checkups?

A: Yes, of course.

Q: Arafat complained of stomach pain, could this indicate something?

A: No. He had abdominal pain from time to time, but not constant. A gastrointestinal gastroscopy showed a mild irritation.

Q: In the year prior to his death, how often had you seen him?

A: I was called on the sixteenth day after his illness, and when I went there I saw a group of Tunisian doctors sent by his wife to Ramallah without calling me. These people never had any idea about Arafat's health- never saw Arafat before. I saw four Egyptian doctors and three Palestinian doctors. After I went to Ramallah with my group, I went straight to see him. There were signs of poisoning, manifested by a reddish patch on his face and a metallic, yellow color to his skin.

Q: Did any of these other doctors ask you about his medical history? Have you heard from them since?

A: No, they didn't consult me. Nobody talked to me and none of them knew his health before; except one of the Egyptians.

Q: Have you been contacted since for your opinion?

A: No. No there were strict instructions not to contact me by his wife, according to Palestinian Authority leaders.

Q: How many checkups did he get in the year before his death?

A: Three times.

Q: Was he in good health?

A: Yes, he was perfectly healthy. But I must stress that I was called officially on the sixteenth day of his illness, not at the beginning, so we can't know exactly when it started. This is a very important point. I told Suha Arafat that by sending the Tunisian doctors, you delayed treatment on your husband. A gap of five or six days.

Q: Did you ask the P.A. leaders about this long delay?

A: There was no good answer- no one dared to say anything. I was told that Suha refused me access. Why, I don't know. When I saw him, I decided he must go abroad because there were tests he needed that couldn't be done in Ramallah. There was contact with the French and their response was immediate. They sent a plane and the Jordanians sent two

helicopters to take him to Amman. Nobody offered me to go with him to Paris, and whenever I asked after him, I never got a satisfactory reply. Again, because of one person, probably his wife.

Q: What was his appearance the last time you saw him alive?

A: He lost half of his body weight. He had this reddish spot covering his face, and his coloring was metallic yellow. He was conscious, talking and joking, even. His cognitive functions were perfect. After that I asked all the doctors to meet. We concluded he had platelet deficiency. Some of the causes for this were not clear, so I asked he be transferred to Paris as soon as possible. But even the French doctors didn't ask me for his previous history.

Q: Did Arafat know he was dying?

A: Yes. Yes, actually I heard from him in Ramallah, that he thought he'd been poisoned.

Q: Did he say who or why or how?

A: No.

Q: Last September 25th, 2003, there was an illness that some P.A. leaders in the Muqata said marked the start of his physical decline. What do you think?

A: I don't think so, because I went with a team to Ramallah from Jordan to investigate all known types of poisons. We took blood samples and there were no poisons, or HIV infection.

Q: According to Islamic law, when the cause of death is questionable, an autopsy is required?

A: That is absolutely true. I requested four things: a committee to investigate his health and the progression of his illness. I wanted all results of the Paris tests and to see the French doctors. I asked for cause of death and if it was not identified to perform an autopsy.

Q: Considering that Yasser Arafat was a major world figure for half a century, shouldn't an autopsy have been demanded? Why was it denied? Who denied it?

A: All of them. All the leadership, those with him in Paris and Chairman Mahmoud Abbas. He said there is no need, he is already buried. I said "its not up to you."

Q: Did you feel Abbas made the decision alone or it was a committee decision?

A: I don't know.

Q: When you said publicly you thought he'd been poisoned, did you get threats?

A: No the P.A. said I should communicate this to them, which I had done from the first.

Q: Some news accounts said the French government would be upset by an autopsy?

A: This is very stupid, I don't think this would upset them. If someone dies of unknown causes, it is mandatory to have an autopsy- mandatory! They know the regulations. Here in Jordan, bodies have been exhumed many times in criminal cases.

Q: Is there a time limit to exhuming a body to trace forensic causes?

A: It depends on the agents used. I suspect Arafat died of a "killing poison", a catalyst. The death was due to this.

Interview: Palestine Foreign Minister Nasser Al Kidwa

Sept 16, 2005

by Trish Schuh

UNITED NATIONS, New York – At the United Nations 60th Anniversary World Summit, Palestine Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Nasser Al Kidwa, addressed the UN General Assembly on behalf of President Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian people. He appealed for international support to end the Israeli Occupation and for final status recognition of a Palestinian State.

Referring to his uncle, former President Yasser Arafat, he said; "It is for this noble cause that the late leader stood before you for the first time in 1974 and delivered his historic speech for the sake of peace and security in the region." As the first anniversary of Yasser Arafat's passing nears, I later asked Al Kidwa some questions about his death.

Q: There has been controversy over the French medical report about Yasser Arafat's cause of death. After viewing the medical charts, you said you thought Arafat was poisoned. But it seems now you have changed your opinion. Could you explain?

A: I have never said I thought this. I said there are serious question marks because of the fact that doctors at the hospital- a very good hospital- did not reach any conclusion on the diagnosis of the illness. This remains the case. There was some junk in one Israeli paper that asserted something. Strangely enough, The New York Times asserted the exact opposite the same day- which suggests that all of this is complete buloney. What we said originally- what the French doctors said originally is precisely accurate. There is no diagnosis. All three possibilities were looked at in the cause of low blood platelets.

You can not but have a big question mark as to the possibility of poison. That's what we said and we maintain this position. Are we going to have proof? No. Given our severe limitations, technically and politically, we know we are not going to reach any final conclusion now. That's why we said the file has to remain open and the Palestinian people have the right to know the reality. I said I am confident the reality will be known in the not too far future.

Q: Arafat's longtime physician, Dr. Ashraf Al Kurdi said in Amman he wanted an autopsy to be done, but it was forbidden. Why? Would the body ever be exhumed to solve the mystery?

A: No. And this is not a new position. We said this for two reasons. One, because of the social and religious reasons when dealing with a great man of this kind. This is not something that Muslims would allow.

Q: Al Kurdi claimed otherwise. That Arafat's historical significance mandates the matter be resolved for posterity.

A: He can claim what he wants to claim. I am telling my position. This is the first reason. The second reason is the limitation in our ability to know. You take an autopsy and do what? Send it to America so you can know the truth?

Q: So Palestinians can know the truth. Would you consider an independent, legitimate international team of doctors to do a full investigation to quell what could otherwise be endless speculation?

A: You know this whole thing is really big... Anyone who understands politics, understands the limitations of this... The only thing we can do is keep the file open and maintain the facts as they are now without permitting anyone to destroy those facts as some people have been trying to do- in a very lousy way, I might say, and without any credibility.

Q: Have you suggested that there could be poisons used that are undetectable?

A: Oh yes, sure. It all depends on your capability. Yeah, sure.

Q: So what of the recent article on this subject in The New York Times?

A: There was nothing new in their report- no new facts published. It was just total nonsense- nonfacts with no credibility whatsoever.

Q: And the account in the Israeli Haaretz?

A: It wasn't serious- more nonsense. Nothing mentioned there was serious. It's as simple as that.

New York Times reporters Lawrence Altman and Steven Erlanger recently published an article after analyzing Arafat's medical records. Haaretz author Avi Isacharoff authored "The Seventh War: How We Won and Why We Lost the War With the Palestinians" dealing with Arafat's death. After contacting each of these reporters, I was told that results are still inconclusive. Also unclear is why Arafat's doctor- who first raised the issue- was not consulted. Since Israel was accused of poisoning him- it is also a mystery why his records were only released to investigators known to be allied with Israel.

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