

The Arafat Assassination: Israel's Lethal History with Polonium

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With news breaking in Al Jazeera this week about the possible poisoning of Yasser Arafat by polonium, I thought it worthwhile to examine an interesting line in Clayton Swisher's report, which refers to an accident in an Israeli lab involving the material. Through further research, I discovered that this was the first nuclear accident in Israeli history and it took the lives of a number of Israeli researchers, both immediately after the accident and even decades later.

[This report](#) by Haaretz's Akiva Eldar is based on Michael Karpin's book, *The Bomb in the Basement: How Israel Went Nuclear and What That Means for the World*:



Dr. Dror Sadeh: One of earliest victims of Israeli polonium poisoning, died of cancer at age 60 after major 1957 radiation leak

According to the book, in 1957 a leak was discovered at a Weizmann Institute laboratory operated by the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC). Traces of polonium 210 were found on the hands of Prof. Dror Sadeh, a physicist who researched radioactive materials, as well as on various objects in the professor's home. The AEC handled the accident with deep secrecy. After a short investigation, whose results were not presented to even the workers, the lab was hermetically sealed for several months.

A month after the lab closed, a physics student died of leukemia. A few years later, Prof. Yehuda Wolfson, Sadeh's direct supervisor, also died, and Prof. Amos de Shalit, the department's director, died of cancer in 1969 at age 43.

When the leak was discovered, Sadeh was terribly anxious, but tests indicated he was well. But according to Karpin's book, the tests did not include his bone marrow. Sadeh and his wife hid the facts from their family and friends until he died prematurely. The cause of death was cancer.

The Israeli authorities did not admit that the leak and the deaths were connected, but people close to Sadeh confirmed that the state took responsibility for the accident and compensated his family.

[This obituary indicates](#) Sadeh, who later became a renowned astrophysicist, proved a fundamental principle of Einstein's theory of relativity, and was the director of the Israeli space agency, died at age 60 in 1993.

[Here is another source](#) offering more information on the cause of the leak, and the scientists

contaminated, including the graduate student who died:

The first nuclear accident in Israel took place before the reactor was operational. In the years 1956-1957 scientists in the Weizmann Institute were preparing for the construction of the reactor and the production of a bomb. "Material which was supposed to seal the nuclear substance and protect it from leaking cracked and radioactive materials leaked. This was discovered late, and high reading of nuclear material was found in the laboratory and in the bodies of some of the workers. High radiation was also found in the homes of the young scientists, articles they touched and even their children's beds. This was reported by Maariv in 2006 after a period of censorship in these matters for nearly 50 years (a report by Chen Kotz-Bar).

...Dror Sade himself wrote: "During 1956-1957 I was working in the radioactive laboratory in the Weizmann Institute. I was an employee of the Israeli Nuclear Energy Committee. As part of my work I treated a radioactive source which emitted alpha rays. This source was coated with a very thin layer of plastic material designed so that all the radiation would be directed towards the target. For a long period of time there was no monitoring of the radiation in the institute. Then one day a test was conducted on a table at the lab, and Alpha radiation well exceeding normal level was detected. Even in my home radiation was detected. The lab was sealed for some months. In my urine tests no radiation was found, but no attempt to test other organs (e.g. bone marrow) was made. One month after the lab was closed one of the physics students died from blood cancer. As far as I can remember his name was Yonathan Ramberg.

Asia Ramberg, widow of Yonathan Ramberg (the student who died of leukemia) recalled: "I remember that someone from the institute came and said that he had to go as soon as possible to the hospital." Bamberg was a graduate student at the Weizmann Institute at the time and was the youngest faculty member in Dror Sadeh's group.

"Yonathan was 28 at the time. He was feeling quite ill and large spots started to appear on his body. I was not even scared; I just saw the bright side of things. We went to the hospital Friday and on Saturday they told me that he was very ill. The day after that, Sunday, was our second anniversary. I picked a few flowers, and when I got to the hospital I saw Yonathan dwindle in front of my eyes. He died the same day. I was in shock. My parents collected me from the hospital like a broken egg-shell. I was helpless. I barely spoke for three years. I did not investigate what happened. Nothing."

It makes perfect sense that Israeli intelligence, learning about both the accident and its repercussions for the health of the lab workers, would be interested in learning everything it could about polonium poisoning. When you have a lemon, you make lemonade, right? Clearly, Russia had a similar program because its polonium was used, likely by its intelligence agents, to poison Alexander Litvinenko in 2006.

Israel operates a [major facility at Ness Ziona](#) which experiments with chemical and biological agents. It would make sense if research was performed on polonium, it would've happened here.

Now that the PA has agreed to exhume Arafat's body in Ramallah, further testing has at least a 50% chance of determining whether polonium killed him. Testing of his body tissues could also isolate the nuclear facility from which the polonium was produced. If Israel killed him, it would've been far smarter to have procured Russian polonium than to have used

material from Israel's Dimona reactor. But if the material is from Dimona, the killers would then be exposed.

Though we can't know for sure whether Israel did it, we can see who is creeping out of the mire to debunk Al Jazeera. Josh Block and Lenny Ben David, both paid pro-Israel operatives (one formerly with Aipac and the second, the Israeli embassy) are [circulating discredited claims](#) that Arafat was a "sexual deviant" (Elie Leshem happily published this nonsense in The Times of Israel and justified it by falsely associating the term "pederast" with Arafat) who engaged in gay sex with his bodyguards and died of AIDS. The AIDS claims was convincingly debunked within the Al Jazeera documentary by a specialist who tested him (as did the French hospital where he died) and found him HIV negative. The gay sex smear was peddled in a smutty book by the Romanian ex-secret police chief under Ceausescu, who defected to the west. That was good enough for the "quality journalism" represented by the Times of Israel and its crusading, truth-seeking editor, Elie Leshem. 'Nuf said.

The [Jerusalem Post quotes](#) an "expert" falsely claiming that polonium deteriorates so quickly that no traces of it could remain after eight years. This expert has [no scientific training](#), and in fact has a PhD in *political science* and is a colonel in the IDF. Hussein Ibish, DC neocons' favorite Arab, [writes in Foreign Policy](#) that the Al Jazeera story is bogus because the symptoms Arafat presented at death were inconsistent with polonium poisoning. Ibish offers no scientific support for his claims. In ad hominem tweets calling me "raving mad," Ibish quotes a post I wrote in 2004, two weeks after Arafat died, speculating that he died of AIDS. This eight year-old post was first dredged up by Islamophobe pro-Israel blogger, David Lange. Neither Lange nor Ibish note that five years ago I posted that Sharon likely ordered the killing. If Arafat is found to have been poisoned by Polonium, that 2007 post will have been proven correct. In the world of intellectual sham inhabited by these two, you can't change your mind about anything. Returning to Arafat's symptoms, at least one he exhibited, severe diarrhea, is consistent with such poisoning. Ibish, of course, doesn't mention this. Though it is true that Litvinenko lost his hair and Arafat did not.

The fact that such figures have come out of the woodwork to protect Israel from culpability for Arafat's death indicates there are those within Israel's intelligence apparatus who want to obfuscate and confuse rather than shed light on these issues.

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