

Lancet report supports accusation that Yasser Arafat was poisoned

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The *Lancet*, one of the world's leading medical journals, has published a report supporting the thesis that Yasser Arafat was poisoned with polonium-210.

The president of the Palestinian Authority died in a French military hospital in November 2004 after falling ill at his headquarters in Ramallah.

The study did not address the question of whether Arafat had been assassinated or how he had come into contact with polonium, but the presence of the radioactive isotope points irrefutably to Arafat's murder. Given the difficulty of obtaining the isotope by anyone other than the nuclear powers and asking *cui bono* (who benefits?), the murder could only have been planned—if not carried out—by Israel or the United States.

The office of Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu dismissed the report, saying he had “nothing new to say” on the death of Arafat.

The study, *Improving Forensic Investigation for Polonium Poisoning* was published on October 12. It described an examination by Swiss scientists of 38 items belonging to Arafat, including his underwear and a toothbrush, and their comparison with a control group of 37 items of his that had been in storage for some time before his death. The toxicologists found traces of the substance that “support the possibility of Arafat's poisoning with polonium-210.”

The scientists added, “Although the absence of myelosuppression [bone marrow deficiency] and hair loss does not favour acute radiation syndrome, symptoms of nausea, vomiting, fatigue, diarrhoea, and anorexia, followed by hepatic and renal failures, might suggest radioactive poisoning.”

The length of time that had elapsed since Arafat's death made the detection of polonium, which decays relatively rapidly, more difficult. Nevertheless, “... on

the basis of [the] forensic investigation, there was sufficient doubt to recommend the exhumation of his body in 2012.”

The report was written by scientists from the Institute for Radiation Physics in Lausanne and the University Centre of Legal Medicine, Lausanne-Geneva, some of whom had carried out the tests published in an Al-Jazeera broadcast last year.

The news channel's nine-month investigation into Arafat's death revealed that the Swiss examination of his medical records and some of his belongings provided by his widow Suha Arafat, including his toothbrush, clothes and his kaffiyeh, contained traces of polonium.

Suha Arafat first voiced her suspicions about the cause of Arafat's illness when he was in hospital in France in 2004. Arafat had been flown to a French military hospital suffering from severe nausea and stomach pain after vomiting during a meeting. His symptoms worsened despite medical treatment, with his liver and kidneys failing. He died a few weeks later after lapsing into a coma.

Arafat's remains lie in a mausoleum in the Mukatta in Ramallah, which is guarded by troops.

Rumours mounted that Arafat had been poisoned, particularly as the doctors were unable to identify what had led to a cerebral haemorrhage that caused his death.

Following the Al-Jazeera broadcast last year, Suha Arafat pressed the Palestinian Authority to exhume his body to enable an autopsy to establish the cause of death.

Her request embarrassed Mahmoud Abbas, the president of the Palestinian Authority, Washington's choice to succeed Arafat in the elections held shortly after his death. The PA never undertook any serious

investigation into Arafat's death. Abbas was forced to accede to her request when Mufti Mohammed Hussein, the West Bank's top Muslim cleric, said he had no objection to the autopsy.

Samples from Arafat's corpse were sent to forensic teams in Switzerland, France and Russia in November 2012 to determine whether he was indeed murdered with polonium-210, the same substance that caused the death in London in 2006 of the former Russian KGB agent-turned-Kremlin-critic Alexander Litvinenko. The investigations by three teams of toxicologists into Arafat's remains, the shrine and earth samples continue. It is not known when the results will be published because of legal procedures.

Responsibility for Arafat's death has long been attributed to Israel's Mossad secret service, which has a record of carrying out kidnappings and assassinations of Palestinian leaders and more recently Iranian nuclear scientists. In 1997 it carried out a botched attempt to poison Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal in Amman, Jordan by spraying a poison into his ear. Two of the agents were arrested almost immediately. The Jordanian authorities were furious and insisted that Israel provide an antidote to save Meshaal's life.

In 2002 and 2004, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, and in 2003 Deputy Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, were on record as having threatened to assassinate Arafat, and there are believed to have been numerous attempts on his life.

Just weeks before Arafat's final illness, Sharon reiterated the threat, telling the *Ma'ariv* newspaper that Israel would "operate the same way" against Arafat as it had against Hamas leaders Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and Abdel-Aziz al-Rantissi—both were assassinated by Israel. Sharon had repeatedly stated that he regretted not killing the Palestinian leader during the siege of Beirut in 1982.

Uri Avnery, a former Israeli legislator and peace activist, reported that just before Uri Dan, a close confidante of Sharon, died, he published a book in France. The book reports that Sharon told Dan about a conversation Sharon had with President George W. Bush. Sharon asked for permission to kill Arafat and Bush gave it to him, with the proviso that it must be done undetectably. When Dan asked Sharon whether it had been carried out, Sharon answered, "It's better not to talk about that."

Israel's hatred of Arafat stemmed from his relentless support for Palestinian statehood and his refusal to suppress the militant opposition to Israel from the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, Islamic Jihad and Hamas, which would have entailed launching a civil war against his own people. His successor, Mahmoud Abbas, had no such scruples. He used the PA and its security officials, such as Mohammed Dahlan, who dealt regularly with the CIA and Israeli intelligence officials, to carry out the dictates of Israel and the US.

According to the magazine *Vanity Fair*, the US supplied Dahlan with arms and cash, trained his men and ordered him to carry out a military coup against Hamas, which had won the PA elections in January 2006 in the Gaza Strip. However, the elected Hamas government was forewarned and carried out a pre-emptive counter-coup, routing his forces.

The PA was later to fall out with Dahlan, expel him from Fatah and accuse him of building a private armed militia in the West Bank aimed at supplanting Abbas. A report by the PA in 2011 even accused him of involvement in Arafat's death. Dahlan is Israel's preferred candidate to succeed the ailing Abbas.



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