**Longings for Arafat**

By Danny Rubinstein

When looking today at what is happening in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the following question could come to mind: Should we begin longing for Yasser Arafat? The number of terror attacks has indeed dropped since his death, but the Israeli defense establishment is taking the credit for this, and not giving any to the Palestinians. Israeli intelligence has improved, they've built fences and walls, and thousands have been arrested. Nevertheless, recent weeks have seen an increase in attacks, despite the good intentions of the new chairman, Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen). On this backdrop there are many Israelis who would say: What do we care about good intentions? Abu Mazen wants to eradicate terror - but can't. Whereas Arafat could have, but didn't want to. The outcome with both is the same: There's terror. So what difference does it make?

Last Friday, Palestinian police mounted a highly publicized military operation aimed at hunting down a group of armed men, who two days earlier had opened fire on the Jenin police station and killed one policeman. Ten armed men were arrested. The police's success, however, did little to change the black mood prevailing in the territories for quite some time - a mood that has come to be known as the four F's: fassad, which translates into "corruption"; fawda, which means "anarchy"; falatan, which is "lawlessness"; and fitna, which is "civil war" or "internal strife." A little of all of them existed with Arafat, but not to the same extent as they do now, during the days of Abu Mazen.

It was a given from the day Abu Mazen was elected chairman of the Palestinian Authority. He is not cut out of the same cloth as Arafat; neither did he seek to be. He was never a hero or fighter, a charismatic man, or a symbol of the nation. He was said to have been entrusted with fulfilling a task - not realizing a vision. A leader of such character can translate this weakness into political power: He can be pragmatic, reasonable. He is not burdened with the load that weighs down on a leader whose entire essence is impairing symbolism.

Arafat, for example, as chairman of the PA, never visited Jerusalem (he was driven quickly through the city once late at night when the helicopter in which he had been flying was grounded). Israel's governments didn't want him to visit the city. However, he, too, thought that it wouldn't be right for him to visit the city he had designated as the capital of his state while it remained under occupation.

Abu Mazen, on the other hand, has said the location of his first meeting (after the Sharm el-Sheikh summit) with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is of no importance. "The content of the meeting is the important thing, not its location," he explained. The two met last week, as a result, at Sharon's home in Jerusalem - and the criticism was not late in coming. Hamas spokesmen commented that the damage done by Abu Mazen in hurrying to meet with Sharon was further compounded by the fact that he had agreed to a meeting in Jerusalem, thus granting recognition to Israel's claim that Jerusalem is its capital.

It turns out, however, that the content of the meeting was also a humiliating message for Abu Mazen. The Palestinian media reported that aside from moralizing at length on the subject of terror, Sharon failed to respond seriously to the Palestinian demands. Abu Mazen told his colleagues on the Palestine Liberation Organization's Executive Committee that he had asked Sharon for answers, for example, concerning arrangements for the opening of the Rafah airport in the wake of the withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces, and that Sharon had condescendingly responded: "Prepare plans and present them to us, and then we will see to what extent we are willing to accept them."

Abu Mazen and his fellow Fatah leaders from Ramallah are going this weekend to an important meeting of the movement's leadership in Amman. The meeting was scheduled in Jordan to facilitate the participation of Farouk Kaddoumi and two of his colleagues who refuse to enter the territories. Those assembled will discuss the proposal to appoint Kaddoumi as Abu Mazen's deputy in the PA and as a member of the PLO's Executive Committee. Arafat never agreed to have deputies. He had political power that Abu Mazen lacks.

When the Israeli pressure is compounded by weak Palestinian leadership, the result is governmental chaos in the West Bank and Gaza Strip

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