

Three Palestinian Leaders

By **KAI Noritake**

< Yasser Arafat >

Chairman Yasser Arafat had lived in Tunis from 1982 to 1994, but even after his return to Palestine he often visited the capital of Tunisia. During my two and a half year stay in Tunisia he returned on several occasions and held discussions with President Ben Ali. Moreover, on Chairman Arafat's first visit to Japan in 1981, I had the privilege of attending his welcome reception. However, since he was surrounded by over 10 security guards approaching him was not an easy task. I felt as if a whirlwind were passing before my eyes each time his group moved.

Chairman Arafat had held his position from 1969 until his death in 2004. Soon after he died, an American newspaper said the Palestinian people could not live with Arafat, but at the same time they could not live without him. In other words, he represents both the good and bad side of Palestine. The article went on to say that because Arafat let the Palestinian people know what it meant to possess a state after 1946, and was seen as a father by them, his failures were forgivable. He was a temperate man on a personal level, but overlooked the fact that his administration generally had little interest in the citizen's welfare. The article also stated that Arafat bought loyalty with money in the manner of a tribal chief. Although this latter point is somewhat exaggerated, there is no denying that when the poor were unable to receive treatment for an illness, Arafat supplied them with the funds for medication. The underprivileged people felt that he was a merciful leader to them. The countless examples of such cases are a key reason for Arafat's popularity.

However, when it came to Palestinian peace in the face of U.S. and Israeli rivalry, he sufficiently demonstrated his talent as a tactician. He believed that if he abandoned Jerusalem, the Palestinian administration would collapse, and that his own life would be put at risk; moreover, he emphasized that he would have to consult with Islamic nations around the world on his handling of the Jerusalem issue. Additionally, he was known to pack his bags and leave when the negotiations did not proceed as he wished. He acted in this manner in the autumn of 2000 at the U.S. Ambassador's Residence in Paris, for instance, whereupon Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was so stunned by his behavior that she grabbed Arafat by the arm and ordered the security guards to lock all the doors.

It is said that Chairman Arafat cleverly controlled violence, as well as the chaos that violence creates for his own advantage. He carefully calculated the way in which turbulent conditions

could change situations, and perhaps this is what prevented them from the armed conflict.

Chairman Arafat was in a sense the 'personality' of Palestine itself. He is said to be the person who brought the Palestine peace negotiations to a halt, but considering that he was taking responsibility for the entire nation into his own hands perhaps this notorious reputation is inevitable. Some argue that he devoted his entire life to bringing justice to Palestine, and therefore it is only natural that he has become a respected figure in consideration for offering his life.

<Mohamoud Abbas>

Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, a youthful gentleman who at first glance appears to be an ordinary individual, differs significantly in appearance from Chairman Arafat. Since he has a *nom de guerre*, there is no doubt that he has taken part in combat missions, but his calm and gentlemanly manner would not lead one to think so.

It is said that the problem of political power inheritance still persists in the Middle East. Present politicians ensure the continuation of power by exercising the same type of charisma as past leaders. A typical example is the shift in political power from Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser to Muhammad Anwar al-Sadat. Sadat overcame this political challenge through signing a peace treaty with Israel after the 1973 Yom Kippur War and retrieving the Sinai Peninsula. I would hope that a similar opportunity will also arise for Abbas, enabling the creation of a peace settlement between Palestine and Israel and the realization of peaceful coexistence between the two countries.

< Farouk Kaddoumi>

Mr. Kaddoumi is the Secretary General for the Political Department of the PLO, the department having its headquarters in Tunisia. The first time we met, I got the impression we were of a similar age after discussing family matters and such. But to my surprise I later learned from the media that he was almost ten years older than I, and that he had accompanied Chairman Arafat to his first meeting with the President Nasser. It is said that it was after this meeting, following Egypt's defeat in the 1967 Six-Day War, that Nasser decided to use the Fatah political group that operated under Chairman Arafat's command. The Secretary General for the Political Department, Mr. Kaddoumi was assigned, is equivalent to the foreign minister of the PLO. There were a few ambassadors to Tunisia who also had jurisdiction over Palestine; they would submit their copies of the credentials to him in accordance with diplomatic protocol. Shortly after I assumed my duties as Japanese ambassador in Tunisia, I received an invitation from the Political Department and met Mr. Kaddoumi. Since then I had several meetings with the General Secretary, he gave me detailed briefs on situation in Palestine, and I realized the difficulty of the peace in the Middle East and strongly reaffirm the need of the early solution. Although Mr. Kaddoumi is second behind Chairman Arafat within the PLO ranks, there probably little chance that he will have a major presence on the political stage as a result of

generational change. A calm, gentle and candid man who does not flaunt his militant career, Mr. Kaddoumi is an unforgettable person for me.

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