

Finding the Lost Peace

by [Dennis Ross \(/experts/dennis-ross\)](#)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Dennis Ross \(/experts/dennis-ross\)](#)

Dennis Ross, a former special assistant to President Barack Obama, is the counselor and William Davidson Distinguished Fellow at The Washington Institute.



Articles & Testimony

In concluding my book last year, I suggested that we might find the missing peace when Yasir Arafat passed from the scene and it became possible to get beyond the dysfunction he cultivated. Little did I suspect he would die before the end of 2004. Now he is gone.

Palestinians saw, as one of his close colleagues observed, that Arafat would prefer to "destroy everything rather than let the world deal with someone else." Another of his senior colleagues confided to me after his death that he was the "father of our chaos." In truth, Arafat became an impediment to change not only between Palestinians and Israelis but among Palestinians as well. And judging from their change in mood after his death, Palestinians knew it. Think how ironic it is that only 45 percent of Palestinians said they were optimistic about the future before Arafat became ill, and nearly 60 percent said they were optimistic shortly after his death.

Arafat left a political system characterized by corruption, ineptitude and a destructive competition among rival factions, all designed to make it difficult for anyone ever to emerge as an alternative to him. Transforming such a system would be a daunting task in the best of circumstances. And, of course, even with the Israeli decision on disengagement, four and a half years of war have not made these the best of circumstances for Palestinians.

Managing the Succession

The conventional wisdom at the time of Arafat's death maintained that Arafat was the only source of authority among Palestinians and that his departure would weaken and factionalize his Fatah movement and cause Hamas to challenge it for power. The leadership void would produce a competition for power that would likely turn violent.

I doubted the conventional wisdom -- not because I questioned the existence of those factors, but because I knew

Palestinians feared the eruption of violence and that this very fear would unify the factions in Fatah and make Hamas and others reluctant to challenge it ...



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