

Rhetorical Questions

Through a Hoop With Arafat

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By Charles Paul Freund
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Yasser Arafat gave us a lesson in the symbolic importance of language last week simply by pronouncing the words required of him.

Following a flubbed public performance on Tuesday, Arafat, in his successful retake on Wednesday, uttered what one commentator called "magic words," and what one of the unofficial American negotiators involved in the process called "talismanic words." Arafat renounced terrorism, embraced the germane U.N. resolutions concerning the Middle East and accepted Israel's right to exist, and he did so in the required word order and with the appropriate English-language nuance (which he could capture by doing it in English).

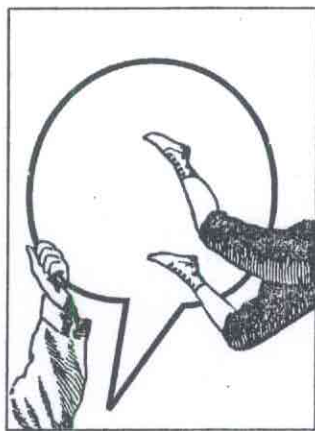
However significant—or otherwise—the political fallout of this meticulously scripted event may be, the process at work was fascinating even by the standards of diplomatic ritual. Something was on display in Geneva that is even more bizarre than the verbal quadrille Embassy Row dances daily: an oddity of the American political culture we can call The Rhetorical Hoop.

Rhetorical hoops, as we know them in the United States, always form under similar conditions: A prominent politician sins in the face of public opinion, and suffers for it in the popularity polls. Sometimes the figure involved has actually behaved shamefully or immorally, but often he or she has simply fallen short of the public image, however fictitious, that was previously enjoyed. Other political cultures resolve these matters when the sinning politician resigns or fires someone else, but never mind them for now.

What is required in the United States, if a politician is to save his political neck, is that he submit himself to the onslaught of public outrage: He must jump publicly

through a rhetorical hoop, confessing—in the words his audience anticipates—that his policies or actions have been mistaken, or that he has otherwise been an ass. He need not even apologize for his misdeeds; confession alone seems good for the American political soul.

The biggest such hoop of recent years was easily the "Okay, So Mistakes Were Made" hoop that Ronald Reagan finally had to jump through in the course of the Iran-contra mess. In fact, the question of whether Reagan would ever admit that something untoward had happened under his nose threatened, for a time, to



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overwhelm the question of just what it was that actually did happen, and how. Furthermore, once Reagan threw himself through that hoop—acknowledging both the passive occurrence of mistakes, and also that he finally understood how some people even thought he had swapped arms for hostages—the fever pitch that the scandal had reached actually abated.

Another such hoop was set up in front of Michael S. Dukakis during the recent presidential campaign: the "I Admit It, I Am a Liberal" hoop. Dukakis, you may already have forgotten (and if so, understandably), tried mightily to avoid the liberal label throughout

the campaign, no matter how many times evidence was offered him that he seemed awfully like one. When, in the campaign's waning days, Dukakis finally uttered the line that awaited him and called himself a liberal, the matter had grown to such proportions that his hoop-jumping, made banner headlines. But then, that's the nature of a domestic Rhetorical Hoop-jump; it is, scripted by circumstance, it fails to address the larger issues that are invariably at hand, and it is, nonetheless perceived to be of enormous importance.

Arafat's Geneva statement adds an unusual dimension to the phenomenon, and not only because the bloody and emotional conflict in which he is involved transcends mere politics. The international hoop is rarely attempted, even more rarely successfully. Kurt Waldheim, for example, has steadfastly refused to jump through the "I Lied" hoop that has awaited him for years. Normally, it isn't even an option. Foreign leaders, even when caught in a scandal—much less when they are asked to abandon everything they have stood for—prefer to leave their positions and let their successors clean up the old problems or pursue new policies.

But then that's the scenario when they are playing on their own field and by their own rules. Arafat's actions in Geneva make the most sense when one considers them a response not merely to our State Department, but to our political culture as well. The Palestine Liberation Organization has evidently concluded that it can advance its cause by appealing directly to American public opinion. In an age when satellites allow foreign spokesmen to go routinely past the U.S. government and directly before the U.S. television audience, we have already seen—and may expect to see many more—foreign leaders behaving like American ones, and speaking their language.

Authorities Now Doubt Mysterious Terrorist Was

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By Jennifer Parmelee
Special to The Washington Post

ROME—For a man presumed to have died five months ago, Samir Mohammed Kadar is getting unusually close attention from anti-terrorism investigators.

Identified as one of the most trusted and coldly efficient operatives of terrorist Abu Nidal, Kadar was thought by authorities to have died July 11 when a car packed with arms and explosives blew up in Athens, killing two men. The incident was tied to a murderous terrorist assault on the Greek ferry City of Poros the same day.

In the weeks following the attack on the ferry, Greek police blamed Kadar for it and said

he had died in the car explosion. Although they were unable to positively identify any of the remains of the two men inside the car, police found weapons and other items with Kadar's fingerprints in the wreckage, as well as remnants of a passport bearing his photograph. Greek authorities have continued to contend that Kadar died in the explosion.

"We presume he died in the explosion," a Greek Embassy spokesman here said recently.

But other European authorities piecing together the bloodstained international trail he left behind—one that includes the 1985 Rome airport attack in which 17 people were killed—say they are convinced Kadar is still alive.

One month after his supposed death, Swedish authorities issued an arrest warrant

charging Kadar in the Greek ferry attack, which killed nine people of Swedish, Danish and French nationality and wounded 90. French, Danish and Italian investigations target Kadar as well, while authorities as far away as Bolivia, India, Pakistan and Sudan also would like to know where he is.

"I don't know of anyone who honestly thinks he died in that explosion," said a western diplomat who has been closely following the investigations. "There wasn't any identifiable piece of Samir Kadar in that wreckage."

The force of the blast blew apart the car and the two men inside: their faceless heads were found 200 yards away, one in a swimming pool, the other on a lawn. The few dismembered fingers collected by police did not

Killed in Blast

match the fingerprints on file for Kadar, and the other body parts clearly belonged to men younger than the middle-aged operative.

But the scattered evidence yielded crucial information for a dossier on Kadar that Italian investigators had already been compiling—and lifted the lid on Abu Nidal's shadowy operations around the world and his Libyan links.

The mysterious case of Kadar is getting renewed interest from investigators lately because of fears that Europe could again be the target of extremist groups like Abu Nidal in the wake of the rapprochement between the Palestine Liberation Organization and the United States.

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TERRORIST, From A19

Greece, which is often painted as a safe harbor for Abu Nidal operatives, last week came under fire from Italy and other western countries when it reneged on a promise to turn over a suspected Abu Nidal member, Abdel Osama Zomar, to Italy for trial and allowed him to go to Libya. U.S. officials in the past have accused Greece of making concessions to extremist groups to avoid terrorism on its soil, a charge that Greek authorities have strongly denied.

The ferry attack was viewed by many as an overt warning to Greece not to cross Abu Nidal, while last week's release was interpreted by Italian officials as Greece's response.

Kadar, alias Michel Nabih Ruffael,

alias Hezab Jaballah, alias Ahmad Abdel Hamid, born somewhere in the Levant, first stepped out from the terrorist underworld into the international limelight in Cyprus with the February 1978 assassination of Egyptian newspaper editor Yusuf Sabai, a close associate of the late Egyptian president Anwar Sadat, and a subsequent hijacking that ended in bloody failure.

Cypriot authorities sentenced Kadar to death for the killing, which was claimed by Abu Nidal. But then they gradually whittled down his sentence until 1982 when, under pressure from Arab groups after the Sabra and Shatila Palestinian refugee camp massacres in Beirut, they expelled him from the country.

In the meantime, according to Italian and American counterterrorism officials, Kadar was "promoted" within the Abu Nidal group.

"He seems to have risen in the ranks from a gunman to a puppet master, from a silly teen-age goon who goes out and shoots people to someone who moved from country to country setting up operations," said the western diplomat.

As part of the spoils for his new status, the officials said, Kadar was assigned to direct Abu Nidal operations in Italy. The first evidence of his presence here has been traced to November 1982, the month after Palestinian commandos fired on worshippers at the Rome synagogue, killing a 2-year-old boy and wounding 37 other people. Abu Nidal claimed responsibility for the attack.

Working out of Rome, Kadar set

up an export-import company that ostensibly traded in Italian marble and shoes but actually served as a front for his clandestine arrangement of logistics, arms and finances for terrorist strikes.

One of his specialties was setting up "hot points," or caches of arms and explosives, around Europe. Investigators have found two of his collections of AK47 assault rifles, the Eastern European "pineapple" grenades favored by Abu Nidal and other weapons, one buried in a forest outside Stockholm, the other in a park in Rome.

Mohammed Sarham, the lone survivor of the Abu Nidal commando squad that attacked the Rome airport, led authorities to the second, saying they always chose an isolated spot that would not get wet and was near a landmark such as an oddly shaped tree.

But Sarham, apparently, did not actually have contact with Kadar. In keeping with Abu Nidal's system of compartmentalized "cells," Samir Kadar kept in the background, allowing him to keep his organizational network intact when lowly commandos like Sarham got caught.

When he was not traveling, according to investigators, Kadar preferred to cultivate potentially important contacts in business circles and indulge his passion for women and fancy cars. Kadar, who is in his late 30s or early 40s, depending on which of his many documents you choose, was described as attractive, with dark Mediterranean features, charm-

ing and gifted in many languages. "He changed women like he changed passports," said one investigator.

It was at an Italian cafe that Kadar met Aija Saloranta, a Finnish woman whom he eventually married in Sweden, according to Italian magistrates investigating his activities here. She was his second wife, his first being a woman he met in Lebanon.

Until he left Italy for Sweden in late 1985, Kadar is believed to have been involved in a string of terrorist strikes that carried the hallmarks of most Abu Nidal operations: a recognizable political objective and brutal disregard for any innocent bystanders who got in the way.

Abu Nidal, the nom de guerre for Sabry Banna, split off from the PLO in a bitter feud in 1974 and since has aimed his attacks at Jewish or American targets, at countries holding his henchmen prisoner, or at "moderate" forces in the Middle East. Sarham has testified that with the attack Abu Nidal sought to undermine PLO leader Yasser Arafat's efforts to negotiate a solution to the Palestinian problem.

Among the attacks in Italy allegedly involving Kadar were: a bungled rocket-launcher attack on the Jordanian Embassy, the attempted bombing of a Royal Jordanian Air-

lines office, an abortive assassination plot against the Jordanian ambassador, and grenade attacks on the posh Cafe de Paris and the British Airways office in Rome. Dozens were wounded and one killed in the latter two attacks, but the worst carnage came on Dec. 27, 1985, when guerrillas attacked Rome's Fiumicino airport, killing 17 people including an 11-year-old schoolgirl.

It was not until 1986 that Italian authorities discovered Kadar had been living among them. By then, he was in Stockholm with his unsuspecting new wife, who bore him a son. Once again, Kadar used a fake trading company as a front and traveled frequently from country to country, an itinerary that often included Libya.

In the spring of 1987, Judge Rosario Priore, one of Italy's top antiterrorism investigators, issued an international arrest warrant naming Kadar for his alleged role in the airport attack. But despite the widely circulated dossier that noted his various identities, Kadar continued to move freely, slipping through the dragnet again and again until last summer's car explosion in Greece.

"That's one of the real questions

from this case," one Italian official said. "Why was Kadar allowed to circulate so freely when so many had his name before them?"

According to documents found by Greek investigators, he traveled at least to Lebanon, India, Sudan, Libya, Greece, Denmark and back to Sweden after the Italian warrant was issued. Before arriving in Greece on June 1, he is suspected of having organized a botched attack on a Pan Am plane in Bombay and a lethal assault on a British club in Sudan that killed seven persons and injured 21.

Before many of the attacks that carried his signature, Kadar apparently traveled to Libya—or that is the indication from airline tickets and the stamps on Libyan, Jordanian and Lebanese passports that he left behind along with his fingerprints in various hotel rooms and the ruined car in Athens.

Some of the arms discovered by Greek authorities also had a Libyan link. Two Italian-made Beretta automatic weapons, one found in the burned-out car, the other on the ferry, were part of a stock sold by the manufacturer to the Libyan Army in 1976.

U.S. authorities contend that Abu Nidal moved his headquarters to Libya in 1987 after he was kicked out of Syria. Investigators probing the Kadar case say the Libyan passport, arms and visits all point to

involvement by that North African country, but they stress that Abu Nidal appears to set his own agenda for terrorist actions.

Despite all that has been learned about the operations of Abu Nidal, many aspects of the operation remain mysterious.

What was the car doing with all the explosives? Did it detonate accidentally en route to help the commandos on board the ferry, or did Kadar have it blown up to again cover his tracks? What was the point of the ferry attack? Was it to warn Greece on terrorist suspects it is holding in prison?

A likely explanation, according to Italian and U.S. investigators, might be that it was intended as a warning to the Greeks about Zomar, the Abu Nidal member who was being held then in a Greek prison on arms-smuggling charges and for whom the Italians were seeking extradition in the Rome synagogue attack.

If that is the case, the plan might be considered a success: Zomar was released last week and put on a Greek jet liner, headed to Libya.