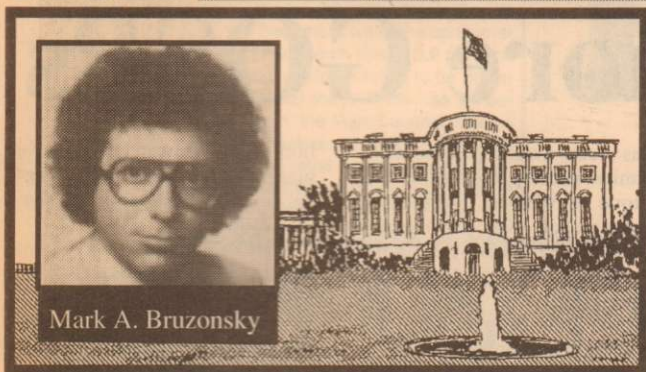


## From



Mark A. Bruzonsky

## Washington

## ABDUL RAHMAN IS BEING REPLACED

## PLO FINALLY CLEANING USA HOUSE

FOR many years now supporters of the Palestinian cause have been forced to put up with the PLO's "man in Washington", Hassan Abdul Rahman.

Finally, it seems, in the wake of considerable internal criticism within the PLO about mismanagement, corruption, nepotism and incompetence — including a number of published articles in major US and Palestinian publications — the PLO's Washington representative is about to be pushed aside.

With Abdul Rahman's impending departure, this particular travesty of representation which has long been a thorn in the side of Palestinian respectability here may be about to come to an end.

Though not yet definite, political grapevine sources who have long considered Abdul Rahman's role here rather scandalous, note that within a few months he is likely to finally be replaced, sent packing to Canada as was the aborted intention some years ago.

But this time, it seems unlikely that desperate manoeuvrings by Abdul Rahman will prevent his departure for Ottawa, a fate which amounts to a kind of political banishment while still allowing him to hold onto certain privileges and sources of income in return for keeping his mouth closed and his loyalties intact.

Still there are those who point out that Abdul Rahman has managed to wiggle out of past efforts to unthroned him. And there are others who further point out that Abdul Rahman and his predecessor before him, Hatem Hussein, have in some ways so demeaned the job of PLO representative in Washington that other more substantial personalities have been reluctant to accept the position.

Abdul Rahman came to the

American capital a decade ago having spend many years at the PLO's United Nations office where I first met him while studying at NYU Law School. He was brought to Washington after a particularly inept television performance by his predecessor Hatem Hussein. Hussein just didn't have what it took to go before the cameras or to deal with the politics of Washington; but it took his exposure one evening on national television to push the PLO hierarchy to bring in someone new.

Yet at the time there were very few persons who had US residency or citizenship and were thus available for the job. Because of what had happened a few years before the PLO seemed most reluctant to try again to bring in any senior personality from the outside.

Indeed, everyone involved at the time remembered very well that the last time the PLO had tried to substantially upgrade it's Washington representation — back in 1975 and 1976 when Sabri Jiryis and Isam Sartawi had been sent to the US to open a "serious" PLO office — the Israeli-Jewish lobby took major steps not only to prevent the office from expanding but to make sure neither of these two highly qualified personalities would ever be allowed to come back to the US.

With the help of Henry Kissinger, then working closely with Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, Israeli operatives managed to get both Sartawi and Jiryis thrown out of the US. Interestingly, the Israelis never made much of a fuss regarding Hussein, nor were they to do so in regard to Abdul Rahman.

And so the era of Hassan Abdul Rahman's personification as PLO "ambassador" in the US sadly began ... a wasted, squandered period of time during the very

*Financial corruption is rampant and only seems to get worse.... The leadership seems to have studied the Marcos regime for tips on nepotism.... The personal and even private lives of some representatives have come to resemble the smell of the open sewer running through the streets of a refugee camp on a hot August day. If the representatives reading this don't understand the comparison, I know a few refugees who would love to show them.*

— Paul Ajlouni

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years when the PLO's image and contacts could have been and should have been substantially pushed forward.

"Put up with" is actually quite mild language for many who have crossed paths with Abdul Rahman during these years. For the bitter reality is that for just about this entire decade many savvy Washington personalities have been telling everyone who would listen, Chairman Arafat in particular, that the PLO's cause was being badly served by a Washington representative who couldn't handle the job and was corrupt.

Examples abound.

Take for instance the one and only meeting between Abdul Rahman and Philip Klutznick, former US secretary of commerce, president Emeritus of the World Jewish Congress, and honorary president of B'nai B'rith. I am personally familiar with this particular story because I arranged the meeting with the help of Klutznick's personal friend then Egyptian ambassador Ashraf Ghorbal.

Klutznick has no reluctance to meet with PLO personalities. Indeed, like his predecessor Nahum Goldmann, he welcomed the opportunity and he was to become a close friend and confidant of the PLO's European representative, Isam Sartawi.

But after a single breakfast meeting with Abdul Rahman at one of Washington's prime spots, the Jockey Club at what was then the Fairfax Hotel on Embassy Row, Klutznick let it be known that he had no further desire to see Abdul Rahman again — and he never did.

Then there's the matter of Abdul Rahman's cutting himself in for as much loot as he could. Very often projects would be budgeted in Washington for one amount but Tunis would be asked for a considerably higher amount. What

happened to the difference is only educated speculation, but many in the know think Abdul Rahman was taking a cut of everything and such amounts went right into his pocket. How else, many ask, was Abdul Rahman able to purchase a few years ago an extremely expensive home, estimated to cost at least a million dollars, in the prime McLean suburb of Washington?

One particular example of Abdul Rahman's financial chicanery and nepotism had to do with his incessant attempts to find jobs for his wife.

Some years ago a couple of persons well-known in Washington came to Abdul Rahman with an idea how to help the Palestinian cause by setting up a new publication. They were willing to work at it, indeed they enthusiastically wanted to take on the Israeli-Jewish lobby, but they needed seed money to get it going. It was agreed that about \$200,000 would be initially needed.

Abdul Rahman's response was that he would instead ask Tunis for \$300,000. The project was approved, his reward in a sense would be that his wife should be hired as administrator of that particular venture and she was to be paid \$150,000 for the first year.

The people who had brought this project to Abdul Rahman in the first place were so surprised by this turn of events and by the way Abdul Rahman handled things that not only were they unwilling to accept the idea of hiring Abdul Rahman's wife in this way but they decided not to pursue the project, or help from Abdul Rahman, any further.

All kinds of shenanigans have been going on for years now at Abdul Rahman's office. At first the office was set up separately in a townhouse as the PLO Information Office. Then when during the Reagan

years the PLO's office was closed down, Abdul Rahman ended up under the umbrella of the Arab League.

After a few years operating under the Arab League's umbrella, and just before Abdul Rahman was "reassigned" for the first time to Canada back in 1990, the Arab League sent an auditor from Tunis to do a check on his finances. What they found, in short, was that a great deal of money was unaccounted for and the presumption was that in one way or another Abdul Rahman had twisted the funds to his own use.

When these findings were reported back to Tunis this became the final straw causing Yasser Arafat to decide that loyalties aside Abdul Rahman had to go. The announcement was actually made that he was being "reassigned" to Ottawa. Abdul Rahman was quite upset; and his wife even more so.

At that point Abdul Rahman took his case to Farouk Kaddoumi during one of his many visits to UN in New York. A long-time ally and colleague, it seems Kaddoumi stepped in and managed to get Abdul Rahman's "reassignment" undone. A short time later, Kaddoumi's son, then studying at a local Washington university, appeared on the payroll at Abdul Rahman's office. He did little but monthly money was passed on to him and he has continued to be involved since then with Abdul Rahman.

At a time of historic development, whatever excuses can be made, whatever explanations can be offered, the PLO has allowed a key position not only to be filled by someone who wasn't up to the challenge but by someone who has actually demeaned the Palestinian cause and squandered the PLO's resources and credibility. How tragic a story. Hopefully the end is in sight.